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Vol. II

# I V O R S.

Eli

BY THE AUTHOR OF

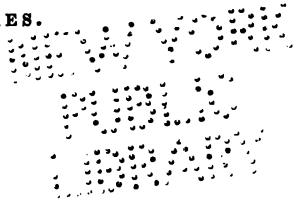
Elizabeth Missions Sewell  
"AMY HERBERT," "CLEVE HALL," ETC.

"Thus speaketh Love: 'Thou in the glance beloved  
Seek to behold not earth, but Heaven: and thus  
Thy better strength shall grow therein more strong,  
Thy star become no light to lead astray.'"

*From the German of RÜCKERT, S. D.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



NEW YORK:

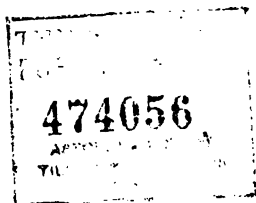
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## CHAPTER XLIII.

THE carriage came for Helen the next day, and she went home: no one pressed her to stay, and neither Isabella nor Anna expressed regret at her departure. She had been too much absorbed in her own thoughts to make herself agreeable. Yet a feeling of exceeding loneliness came over her, as she looked back and saw her aunt's sweet, kind face at the door, and felt that she must now return to the uncongeniality of her own little world, and bear the burden of her doubtful heart without human sympathy.

Mrs. Graham's last injunction had been, "Put aside your feelings, my child, and try yourself by action;" and Helen, in accordance with the suggestion, spent the short time of her drive in thinking over what Claude would most wish her to do. He had talked to her about the employment of her time, urged regularity, suggested visits to the poor; and if he had been there to help her, she might now, perhaps, have entered into his plans. But all seemed vapid when she was to set to work by herself. She thought that her aunt expected too much of her; and, unused to mental exertion, soon sank back into the wearying reveries upon feeling, against which she had been warned.

Lady Louisa Stuart and Miss Manners were looking out

for her, expecting to hear amusing stories of the aborigines. Lady Louisa had prepared some more tiresome jokes about Petruchio, and Miss Manners was ready with condolences for his absence; but Helen avoided them both, hurried up stairs to her own room, and was soon followed thither by Lady Augusta.

"You have had such a disappointment, my love; I can't say how vexed I have been, more almost for Claude than for yourself; he is terribly cut up about it, as he says in his note."

"May I see the note, mamma?"

Lady Augusta hesitated. "I don't know that I have it with me." She took out a number of notes from a pocket-book. "This,—no, this is not from Claude,—it is Mrs. Hopeton's apology for not coming to-morrow night; and there has been a request from Sir John Hume that he may bring a niece; and Lord Steyne talks of a friend who wishes to come: we shall have quite a crowd."

"That is Claude's note," said Helen, pointing to one folded in a peculiar way, and written on rather blue note-paper.

"How quick you are in discovering, my dear!" but Lady Augusta appeared unwilling to produce the note, till Helen put out her hand for it.

"It is a short note—condensed; all his are; but his few words express more than volumes from other people."

Helen read the note.

"My dear LADY AUGUSTA,

"A telegraphic message has just summoned me to London, and I have not a minute to spare. It is most unfortunate, as I shall not be able to be at Mrs. Graham's to-night, to exhibit the magic lanthorn; and I am, of course, particularly vexed in thinking of Helen. I enclose a note for Sir

Henry about some political matters, which I wished to have talked over with him. I don't know when I shall be down again; but you may be sure it will be the very first day possible. You will, I trust, have a successful evening; I wish, indeed, I could be with you; but I have foreseen from the beginning how it might be, and must resign myself as best I may, though I do not yet give up all hope.

"Very faithfully yours,

"CLAUDE EGGERTON.

"I have written to Helen, and made arrangements for some one to exhibit the magic lanthorn for me."

"He takes the world philosophically," said Helen, in a bitter tone, as she laid Claude's note upon the table.

"His mind is so admirably well-disciplined," replied Lady Augusta. "He never allows himself to be disturbed, or at least to show it."

"Some people like the principle of faith in affection," said Helen, sarcastically.

"My love, you are severe. What lessons have you been learning at Wingfield? But I ought not to find fault: I should remember that young people can never be satisfied with any expression of affection."

"I am infinitely obliged to Claude for taking thought for me and the magic lanthorn together," said Helen, again taking up the note.

"You are laughing, my dear; you don't really mean to be so unjust."

"I read the words as they are written," said Helen.

"And put a wrong interpretation upon them."

"And take them for what they mean, rather."

"Why should much be said to me?" continued Lady

Augusta: "you have his own words to yourself to satisfy you."

Helen was silent.

And silent she continued, then and afterwards, during the day; brooding over her own distracting thoughts, blaming Claude, condemning herself, yielding, as she ever yielded, to impulses from within, and influences from without; jarred upon by Lady Louisa's tiresome jokes; fretted to irritation by Miss Manners' stately condolences or Claude's absence; alarmed by Lady Augusta's keen looks of surprise; and startled by her father's quick, though good-tempered reproofs of her dulness.

Could it be a matter of astonishment, if the great question, which was to decide her fate, became more and more bewildering, and was thought over, settled, unsettled, settled again, and in reality left to be determined—Helen knew not how, and dreaded to think?

Such was the state of things on the day of the ball. The routine of Ivors was disturbed then, as had been the case at Wingfield, a few days before; but the disturbance was of a very different character, being managed by the servants, who were bound to take care that no one should be "put out" more than was absolutely necessary, and therefore kept all arrangements to the utmost in the background. Lady Augusta, indeed, superintended herself, but that was her habit; she superintended everything, and never believed that the world could go on without her; but Helen was not consulted, except about the music, and had a long, dull, dreary day with Lady Louisa and Miss Manners, feeling that she had no excuse for leaving them, and yet longing more and more every minute to go to her own room, and indulge in some of those "few more" thoughts which, although they prevented her from arriving at any definite conclusion, were becoming *a necessary of life*.

"It is a comfort that balls are not given every day," said Miss Manners.

The observation broke a long silence in the library, though not in the house, for the sound of hammering was heard unceasingly.

"I don't think they interfere much with us," said Helen, quickly; fearing a quotation from Shakspeare.

Lady Louisa looked up from a novel, and owned that she had been nearly asleep, and asked what they were talking about.

"Balls," replied Miss Manners. "Helen likes them."

"I beg your pardon, but I am not aware that I said so," replied Helen, shortly.

"But you implied it, my love, and it is natural, I imagine, at your age, when the fresh spring of youth and enthusiasm makes movement delightful. For myself, I confess, my tastes lay always in a different direction; a search into the wonders of creation, which afforded food for reflecting hours, was from infancy my craving."

"A geological baby," said Lady Louisa; "I wish I had seen you."

Helen laughed faintly, and observed that she certainly could not imagine Miss Manners dancing.

"Not a minuet?" asked Lady Louisa.

And Miss Manners answered sharply for herself, that minuets had ceased to be in fashion, long before she was old enough to dance.

"I was thinking whether a minuet would suit Petruchio," said Lady Louisa. "If I remember rightly, he does not take kindly to the polka."

"Neither for himself nor for any one else, does he?" inquired Miss Manners. "I thought I understood as much from some remark of Lady Augusta's the other day."

Helen shrank from the subject with irritation and annoyance.

Lady Louisa observed it, and, as usual, had not sufficient tact or kindness to overlook it.

"He does not interfere with you, Helen, I hope. I really shall be quite out of patience with him in that case."

Helen appeared not to hear, and Lady Louisa fancied she looked vexed.

"Too bad!" she continued: "A real Petruchio!

"Better 'twere that both of us did fast,"

and then he goes away and leaves you to fast alone. I would be revenged upon him."

Helen's pride could not brook this; she remarked, coldly, "That Mr. Egerton and she quite understood each other," and walked out of the room, followed by the sharp tone of Lady Louisa's laugh.

In the hall she encountered her father, and was turning from him, so as not to speak, when he stopped her. "What! running away from me, my child? I have scarcely seen you this morning. A dull day, I am afraid," and he kissed her,—“but we must try to be merry for the sake of others.”

"We shall do very well, I dare say," replied Helen, in a light tone, which effectually repelled sympathy.

"It was too bad of Claude," continued Sir Henry; "or, I suppose one must say of his lawyer. I don't believe, myself, that there was any necessity for his going. I know the business they make such a fuss about. It was one of Claude's crotchets, to meet that particular individual on that particular day; but I am certain it might all have been done as well by writing. You musn't let him be crotchety, Helen. He is too young to begin in that line." Sir Henry patted his daughter on both cheeks, and went to his own room.

*Helen went to hers. For the next half hour she might*

have been heard walking up and down, with somewhat of a man's restlessness; then she took up a pen and wrote,—

"I cannot give you the answer you require, my mind is full of perplexity; but I am sure of one thing, that I shall never make you happy, and therefore it is better we should part." The pen was thrown down, when Helen had gone so far, whilst pressing her forehead tightly, as though to still the working of her brain, her eye retraced the words; then opening a private drawer in her desk, she took Claude's letter from it, and laid it beside her.

"My lady wishes you to come down into the hall, if you please, Mademoiselle;" said Annette's voice at the door.

It was immediately followed by Lady Augusta's. "Helen, my love, may I say one word to you? Are you busy?"

Helen unfastened the door.

"I am sorry to interrupt you, my dear, but I wanted to ask your opinion—but you are writing for the post." Lady Augusta's eyes fell with a scrutinizing glance upon the table.

"It is nothing, it need not go to-day," said Helen, impatiently.

"But you are desirous it should, I see. I had no idea you were so engaged, but Claude will be anxious to hear from you."

Helen longed to be able to say that she was not writing to him.

"I will keep my business till presently," continued Lady Augusta; "though one thing I may as well say now: I am anxious to know how matters stand with you about the ball. Does Claude still think of keeping you under his loving restraint?"

Helen broke in upon the sentence: "Mamma, Claude will never keep me under restraint any more; we are part-



ed,"—she leaned her head upon the table, and burst into tears.

"Parted! Helen! can you dare?"—Lady Augusta's eyes sparkled,—but with one moment of self-recollection her manner changed. She took Helen's hand in hers. "There is some misunderstanding in this, my love."

"There has been a misunderstanding from the beginning," said Helen, recovering herself, and speaking with dignity; "we were never intended for each other."

"Nonsense! my dear; begging your pardon, simple nonsense! What is it all? Let me hear whose fault it is." Lady Augusta sat down, tapping the table with a paper knife, as though she would fain have beaten the words out of Helen's mouth.

"It is no fault;—yet, I suppose it is mine,—it will be called mine," said Helen, proudly.

"Because you have provoked him, silly, infatuated child! You have treated him as you have done every one from childhood. I saw how it would be. I felt you were casting away all the advantages for which I had laboured."

The conversation heard on the evening of Mrs. Graham's party, flashed upon Helen's recollection. In an instant it came to her with its full meaning. She started from her seat, and exclaimed: "Then you have laboured, mamma! The world is right, and Claude has been entrapped."

There was one moment's pause. Lady Augusta's reply came forth, slow, measured, soft, and mournful:—"Yes, entrapped, if you so please to call it; brought by the ordering of Providential circumstances into close intercourse with one as fair as she is false and weak; made to rest his happiness upon her, and then deceived. Helen, you have cruelly disappointed me."

"Not as I have disappointed myself," replied Helen, "nor"—her voice shook,—“as I have disappointed Claude."

"Does he say so?" asked Lady Augusta, sarcastically, her eye turning to the letter in Claude's handwriting, which was by Helen's side.

Helen would not see the unspoken request, that it might be read; she only replied: "He requires of me more than I can give, and therefore it is better we should part."

"Helen, you are too idiotic!" exclaimed Lady Augusta. "How many wives do you think give their husbands what you would call their full affections before they are married?"

"Aunt Fanny thinks that I am right," said Helen.

Lady Augusta did not instantly trust herself with a reply; when she did, she drew near Helen, laid her hand upon her arm, with a firm, painful pressure, and said, speaking between her half-closed lips: "This is the first and last time, Helen, that Mrs. Graham comes between you and me."

"She is my aunt," said Helen.

"And I am your mother. In the eyes of the world I hold your mother's place."

Helen's fingers were tightly clenched together, as she replied, "My father shall be my judge."

"Let him be. He will bear none of this folly."

"He will let me be free," said Helen; and she added sarcastically: "he at least has not laboured for my advantage, and so will have nothing to regret."

"I bear with your taunt, Helen. I might have expected no less. Gratitude has always been a stranger to your heart."

"No, mamma; never. I have been grateful to you; I am grateful; for your care, and your kindness and instruction; for things which I never could have had without you; but I am not grateful for having been made a plaything, a tool—having the eyes of the neighbourhood turned upon me in derision. Mamma, if you will not be proud for me, I will be proud for myself. By your own acknowledgment Claude

has not been free in this matter. It is my will that he should be; and from this moment I restore him his liberty."

She took up her pen, and wrote again. Lady Augusta stood by with folded hands, watching, as sentence after sentence followed rapidly. When, at length, Helen's name was signed, Lady Augusta laid her hand upon the paper, and said: "It is for your father's perusal."

She expected a burst of passion, but Helen's answer was calm: "It is intended for him to-morrow."

And Lady Augusta, leaving the letter in Helen's possession, departed without another word.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

BRILLIANTLY gay was Ivers on the evening of the long expected ball. London workmen had fitted up the hall for dancing; artistic taste had hung the walls with rich drapery, and decorated them with evergreens and flowers, and brightened the long rooms by silver sconces, and gorgeous chandeliers. It was a scene of fairy land, magic in its beauty; room opening into room; mirror reflecting mirror; a maze interminable of light and colour; and through these dazzling apartments wandered Lady Augusta Clare, queen-like, in a dress of rich dark velvet, and a magnificent shawl of Brussels lace, fastened by a diamond brooch. Yet the cares of her domestic kingdom sat heavy upon her head. She remarked everything, knew whether everything was in its right place, but it was by instinct only. Even when she gave her final decisive orders, her heart was not in her words. There was a marked nervousness in her manner, as though *she dreaded some startling news, or some painful interview.*

"Is Sir Henry in his study, Marks?" was her question at last to the servant who had been following her footsteps, and executing her commands.

"Sir Henry went to his room about half an hour ago, my lady. I don't know whether he has come down again."

"Go and see;" and Lady Augusta sat down wearily in an arm-chair by the fireside, and in her splendid drawing-room, sighed a real, hearty sigh, in which there was no striving for effect.

Marks was gone a long time, but Lady Augusta was patient; except that every now and then she raised her head quickly, as a figure passed the open door at the further end of the room.

Presently there came one which did not pass, but paused, looked into the apartment, evidently not seeing that it was occupied, entered, and stood for a few seconds under the glass chandelier.

A very lovely face and form it was,—perfect in grace, attractively sweet, though with somewhat of proud sadness in its expression; but when Lady Augusta said "Helen!" there was a sudden start,—the whole countenance changed; a fierce, fiery glance flashed like lightning over it, and Helen turned away, and walked slowly out of the apartment.

Two hours afterwards the rooms were crowded; dancing had begun; laughter, and conversation, and music mingled their joyous and inspiring tones; and Lady Augusta Clare, as she sailed from room to room, speaking kindly words, and distributing gracious smiles, was looked upon with admiration, envy and respect. Externally, indeed, there was everything to exhilarate her. Heterogeneous as the ingredients of her party were, she yet contrived to assimilate them, by her own judicious tact. On this one evening she seemed to have forgotten exclusiveness, and the dread of contamination, and to be able to *throw herself* into the minds and sympathies of

persons, with whom in general she would have professed to have no one idea in common.

For everything that Lady Augusta Clare thought it wise to do, she considered it also wise to do well; everything except —; but why find fault with her for an exception, common more or less to all? why complain of her principle, when in fact she was perfectly consistent? Lady Augusta did not really think it worth while to labour for Heaven as she did for earth; and therefore she was but carrying out her motives into action, when she left the work of Heaven to circumstances.

"Sitting still, dear Susan? how does that happen?" Lady Augusta placed her hand on Susan Graham's shoulder with a gentle tenderness, which was quite maternal.

"I have been dancing a good deal, and I am tired," was Susan's reply; "and besides, I think,—are n't they going to try the polka?"

"Oh, yes, I see! and your dear mother, I know, is particular. But young people are not all as well disciplined as yourselves, and are apt to be rebellious in these matters. Have you seen Helen lately?"

Lady Augusta looked at the circle forming for the dance with an anxious eye.

Helen was talking to Captain Mordaunt just now," said Susan; "she was near the conservatory."

"Are you enquiring for Helen?" asked Miss Aubrey who, with Mr. Frank Hume, was standing quite close to Susan, waiting for the polka to begin. "She has been undergoing an ordeal of bantering from her brother and Lady Louisa. It really is too bad of them to tease her as they do, only that she is quite a match for them. She is in a most strange mood to-night.

"Maurice is very provoking," exclaimed Lady Augusta;

"I must go and stop him." She moved away with a more hasty step than usual.

Miss Aubrey laughed. "Lady Augusta will have a difficult task if she means to protect Helen from observation. Every one is wondering at this new fancy of hers."

"Oh, about dancing!" and Susan opened her eyes with a look of sudden and astounded perception, which seemed to increase Miss Aubrey's amusement, as she turned away, and whispered to her partner, "Saintly individuals who live in the clouds ought not to venture into a ball-room."

Susan was unconscious of giving rise to satire: she was thinking of Helen; feeling for her annoyance; wondering whether Claude Egerton was quite right; wondering still more that Helen should not have had sufficient tact to keep her own secret. She fell into a reverie, undisturbed; for the fireplace was on one side of her, and Isabella on the other, very much amused in watching the dancing, and not troubling herself to interrupt her.

A sharp voice broke in upon her meditations: "Miss Graham, you are quite in the fashion in sitting down." Lady Louisa Stuart had seated herself by Susan's side.

"Rather the contrary, to judge by appearances," replied Susan. "It is very amusing to look on."

"It must give you a pleasant feeling of superiority; yet I wonder you don't retire with Helen. I have been trying to persuade her that we are, none of us, good enough for her."

"And she is not inclined to take your advice, I suppose," said Susan, in a tone of indifference.

"She likes to be peculiar, as she always does. I have been taxing her with the cause, but she won't acknowledge it." Lady Louisa looked scrutinisingly at Susan; but the glance which met hers gave no reply to the question implied.

"I should have thought," continued Lady Louisa, "that there was *some hidden influence* at work, but that

‘ Love’s feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails ; ’

and there is neither softness nor feeling in making the poor child a mark for general observation in this way.”

“ Perhaps Mr. Egerton trusted too much to the world’s kindness,” said Susan, quickly.

“ Oh, then he is at the bottom of it! I thought so ; ” and Lady Louisa’s countenance lighted up with amusement : “ I was sure you would be able to tell me all about it.”

Susan felt so vexed with herself that she could almost have cried ; yet she showed very little annoyance, and answered coolly, “ Whatever you may wish to know, Lady Louisa, I must refer you to Helen herself.”

“ Thank you, no occasion for that ; between ourselves,— I would not have Helen told of it,—Miss Manners and I have a little bet depending upon the matter. We were sure Petruchio had been at work.” Lady Louisa, in her youthful lace dress, swept across to the opposite side of the apartment, where Miss Manners and Sir John Hume were discussing some geological curiosities lately found in the neighbourhood.

Susan watched her,—saw the smile of understanding—the satirical glance,—and then observed Lady Louisa pass on, whispering her observations to one and the other, whilst curious eyes were directed to the doorway, near which Helen still stood with her brother and Captain Mordaunt. Mrs. Graham’s eyes, also, were bent in the same direction ; and after a few seconds she followed Lady Louisa, and went up to the spot where Helen was standing, like a chafed lioness, proudly warding off the darts aimed at her, yet stung by them to the quick.

“ My love, you must be tired of standing ; there is a seat by Susan ; won’t you come ? ”

*A moment before, Helen’s look and tone had been sati-*

rical and contemptuous; it changed in an instant, when Mrs. Graham spoke; but she said, carelessly, "Thank you, no; I do very well here."

"And Miss Clare is going to be my partner," said Captain Mordaunt.

"I don't know; I may not dance at all. Aunt Fanny, I think I will come with you;" but, instead of joining Susan, Helen turned suddenly away, and crossed the ante-room to the conservatory. Mrs. Graham followed.

The conservatory was empty. Helen sat down at the farthest extremity. "That music! oh, to be out of its reach!" She put her hand to her ear.

"You are nearly so now, and you may stay," replied Mrs. Graham.

"And it is better for me that I should. Yet I can't; I must go back again;" and Helen half rose.

"Mrs. Graham stopped her. "What does all this mean, Helen?"

"I am noticed; I have made myself remarkable; he made me do it."

"He trusted to your own tact and discretion," replied Mrs. Graham, reproachfully.

"It is cruel: he ought to have known what it would be. And that woman, Lady Louisa!"

"You will not place yourself at her mercy, Helen?"

"I am at no one's mercy," exclaimed Helen, hastily. "Aunt Fanny," and her voice sank, "I have resolved to be free."

There was no immediate reply. Helen repeated the words, looking at her aunt steadily; and then Mrs. Graham said, sorrowfully, "I feared it might be so."

Helen went on with rapidity; "I could not do as you told me,—I could do nothing. I don't know why I have decided, *but I have*. He has no right to control me; I could tell Lady Louisa so, if—but, Aunt Fanny, I can't."



"Of course you can't. Explanations with her would be quite out of place."

"She finds out everything. She has been guessing and teasing, and she has set Maurice to tease; and I have laughed with them, as if I did not care; but I can't help caring. There would be one easy way of silencing them all."

"By doing what they wish, you mean?" said Mrs. Graham.

"Yes, showing them that it is all nothing; and that I am not bound now, although they think I am."

"Pardon me, Helen, I should say you are bound." Mrs. Graham's face showed surprise and displeasure.

"What! when I have made up my mind that it shall all be at an end?"

"What you have made up your mind to do is not the question. Is it done? Have you had an explanation with Mr. Egerton?"

Helen twisted the rings of her gold chain with the petulance of a petted child.

"Till you have," continued Mrs. Graham, "you can't possibly consider yourself free. And, Helen, I can scarcely believe that you wish it."

Helen's face changed; pride and temper contended with an expression of inward suffering. She evaded a direct reply, and exclaimed: "He wrote to mamma; there was no feeling for me in what he said. It is his own wish, Aunt Fanny;" as the words were uttered, Helen's conscience reproached her for untruth, and she added: "At least you would think so, if you were to read his words."

"I don't wish to judge. It is quite impossible indeed, my dear child, that I should. All I entreat of you is to command yourself. A very little self-respect will conquer sarcasm."

*Helen's pride was wounded. She said bitterly, "It may*

seem a small trial, but an insect's sting may cause as much irritation as a serpent's: Lady Louisa is unbearable."

"Dearest Helen, think only of what is your plain duty."

"Claude should not have exposed me to observation," replied Helen, sharply.

It was Mrs. Graham's turn then to be vexed. She rose and walked towards the door of the conservatory.

"Aunt Fanny!" Helen's tone was softened, as she followed and tried to detain her aunt. "You are ashamed of me."

"Grieved for you rather, Helen. You have noble and generous feelings, but you are too weak to act upon them."

"Weak! yes, I am weak," exclaimed Helen, passionately: "weak in having ever consented to place myself in a position in which any man could dictate to me."

Mrs. Graham turned and kissed her sorrowfully, but she said no more.

Helen lingered in the conservatory but a few moments longer; and when Mrs. Graham saw her again, a quadrille had been just formed, and she was standing with Captain Mordaunt prepared to take part in it.

It was nearly supper-time. Lady Augusta came up to Mrs. Graham, with symptoms of a tempestuous current underneath her bland exterior: "You have great influence with Helen; do you think you can prevail upon her to do what her father wishes? I say nothing of myself." The tone was painfully bitter.

"I don't understand——" began Mrs. Graham.

"I have no time for explanations, but perhaps, as she confides entirely in you, you would have the goodness to urge upon her attention to her father's guests."

Lady Augusta walked away: Mrs. Graham said quietly to Isabella, who had just sat down by her, "Lady Augusta is annoyed; where is Helen?"

"There, opposite," said Isabella. "You see the circle,—Lord Steyne, and Miss Aubrey, and Lady Louisa, and the Humes. I heard Lady Augusta say just now to Helen that people were becoming dull, and that she ought to exert herself. But, mamma, Helen will go her own way to-night, as she does always. How Lady Louisa is laughing. And Lady Augusta looks so angry, standing in the distance."

There was a discussion going on about a *valse à deux temps* which was to be tried, and in the meantime the music had ceased.

Lady Augusta joined the group, and spoke in rather a low voice: "This really won't do, you must mix yourselves more."

Captain Mordaunt put up his eye-glass, and surveyed the room. "Your ladyship need not be uneasy. We are affording quite sufficient entertainment for the aborigines."

"I had forgotten them," said Helen, carelessly.

"You have done nothing to-night to make yourself agreeable, Helen," observed Lady Augusta, "and your father is vexed with you."

Helen's face flushed at the reproof.

"I see what people think," continued Lady Augusta. "It was all very well at first; but they are herding together now in sets. This kind of thing can't be allowed."

"I can do nothing to prevent it," said Helen.

"You must, my love. If you don't choose to dance with the people, you must talk to them. Maurice, I thought you were going to ask that Miss Dawson to dance."

"Was I? I had forgotten; but it can't be now; we must have the valse first, it has been ordered."

And Maurice languidly turned away, as though he had settled the matter by a conclusive argument, and added; "Now, Helen, say you will stand up."

"It is not the polka," said Lady Louisa, "so there is no broken vow."

Helen changed colour; but Lady Augusta spoke before she could answer. "I can have no nonsense of this kind; a country dance will put every thing right, and then we will have supper."

Maurice held up his hands in despair. "Down the middle and up again! one should faint before one had reached the end. Come, Helen, set the fashion of the valse and every one will follow it."

"And we will not tell upon you," said Lady Louisa. "Sir John, Lord Steyne, Jane, my dear, we can all vow it was not the polka."

"Maurice, order supper immediately," exclaimed Lady Augusta. "Louisa, this is absurd. Helen, I wonder you allow it."

"Nay," replied Lady Louisa, "why not?"

'He does it under name of perfect love.'

"Whatever the name may be," said Lady Augusta, haughtily, "Helen understands the feeling, and values it. Lord Steyne, may I ask you to take Lady Louisa into the supper-room?"

Lady Louisa was silent, but a contemptuous smile curled her lip.

Lord Steyne offered her his arm. Miss Aubrey and Sir John Hume followed the move, and in a few seconds there was a general rush to the supper-room.

Helen seized Lady Augusta's hand, and spoke in a low tone: "I am going to bed; I can't bear this."

"Out of the question, my love. You have scarcely taken notice of any one, and it will be so remarkable."

"I am remarked already. Mamma, when next you speak of me, I must beg that you will not answer for my feelings." Without giving Lady Augusta time to reply, she moved away.

The crowd stopped the doorway, and she could not escape. Captain Mordaunt came up, and asked if he might take her in to supper, and she mechanically acquiesced.

They moved on slowly, and after going a few paces, Helen sat down upon a bench to wait. There was a hubbub of voices, and the band was still playing in the hall, where Maurice had remained, bent upon trying the *valse à deux temps*.

"Carriage wheels!" said Captain Mordaunt. "People are going early."

Helen listened, but heard nothing, except the babel of sounds immediately around her.

Some one near mentioned Mr. Egerton's name. Captain Mordaunt asked when he was expected.

Helen did not know; he might come any day. Her manner was short and ungracious.

Just then Maurice appeared from the hall. As soon as he caught sight of them, he came up. "What! Not gone into supper yet? that's capital. I must have you back again. There are just a few of our own set left."

"Hopeless, I am afraid," said Captain Mordaunt, glancing at Helen. She scarcely heard him; her ear had again caught the sound of Claude's name.

Several servants entered the passage, and there were inquiries for Lady Augusta. She issued from the supper-room radiant in smiles. Her eye fell upon Helen, and she came up to her. "So delightful, my love! he is just come; unexpectedly, indeed. Poor fellow! what an effort he must have made."

Helen's face became pale as death. Lady Louisa Stuart followed close behind Lady Augusta. She stood by Helen unperceived, and murmured,

"An awful rule and right supremacy."

*Petruchio comes to enjoy his triumph."*

Lady Augusta turned upon her, sternly. "Louisa, you forget yourself. Helen, my love, you will have your full reward now."

A contemptuous flash shot from Helen's eyes. She put her arm within her brother's, and said, "Maurice, we will try the valse;" and when the music again commenced, Helen was to be seen whirling in the dance with Captain Mordaunt. On and on, faster and faster, flushed and eager in her proud wilfulness, Helen moved; conscious only of one feeling, that she had asserted her own free will, and had shown herself, as she imagined, independent of Lady Augusta, of Claude, of Lady Louisa Stuart, of the mocking world. Numbers flocked in from the supper-room, and joined the dance. Even in the whirl of her excitement, Helen was aware of a painful, suffocating dread. Even when all swam before her eyes, she sought the forms of the bystanders, and in the bewilderment of rapid motion, strove to distinguish them one from the other, and then, rushing past, forgot or tried to forget, and looked again, and thought she saw,—and hurried on wildly, breathlessly.

"Helen, this is too much; you will be ill." The calm, sad, reproachful tone of Mrs. Graham's voice came to Helen's ear clear as a knell, in the midst of the joyous music. She sank upon the nearest seat, and her dizzy head was buried in her hands. A dark figure stood opposite; a keen, penetrating gaze was fixed upon her. Helen raised her head; her eye met Claude's, and almost staggering, as she seized her aunt's arm for support, she rushed from the hall, and hurried to her own room.

It haunted her, that gaze; it looked upon her from the darkened walls; it came before her, when she knelt, from habit, to repeat her evening prayer; it dwelt with her when she closed her eyes. And what a tale of anguish and disappointment it told!

Helen tore in pieces the letter in which she had explained her feelings, and before Claude retired to rest, he received a few hasty lines.

"I am unworthy of you, and you acknowledge it. We are parted for ever. H. C."

A feverish night succeeded; broken sleep and distracted dreams. When the light of morning broke upon the horizon, Helen, awakened by a rumbling sound beneath her window, was gazing from it at a fly, which stood at the hall door. A man-servant brought out a portmanteau and carpet-bag, and the driver enquired if there was more luggage, and said that the gentleman must be quick, or he would be late for the train.

A cold tremor stole over Helen, and she sat down. A quick step was heard along the passage; it paused before her door. A note or a message it might be; but it passed on, and then there were distant sounds very indistinct. The hall door opened, and Claude came out; the driver let down the carriage steps, and he jumped in. Helen saw his face as he looked out. His eye was seeking her window; it rested there. The carriage drove off, and still, still, the lingering, hopeless, heart-sickening gaze was directed towards her room. But the wheels rapidly turned into the avenue; he was out of sight; and Helen, unable to find relief in tears, sat, cold and deathlike, gazing into vacancy, and realising, for the first time, that in her madness and folly she had cast away a love which it was in her power to return.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

THERE was a large, convenient, but old-fashioned house in Cavendish Square. It had more intricacies, and therefore

more romance, than the generality of London houses: odd little rooms at the back, and curious dark passages in the underground regions. The situation was not a very exciting one; the few laurels, and evergreens, and stunted trees, and the blackened turf of a London square are seldom exhilarating to the spirits, except in the first freshness of spring, when they seem to be the harbingers and earnest of real country; and the negro-hued statue, the presiding genius of the vicinity, standing in the centre of his domains, suggests few historical ideas, except those connected with the inquiry, how long it has taken to cover his naturally pale face with such a sepulchral stain.

But Admiral Clare was very well satisfied with his mansion. It was in the neighbourhood of a good deal that was interesting, and comfortably distant from Belgravia, which, to use his own expression, was his abomination. Moreover,—and it was a most essential point—it was within easy reach of his physician; and the Admiral, having been persuaded to undertake a journey to London, for the benefit of medical advice, was resolved in this case, as in all others through life, to do what he had to do thoroughly, and since he was to study his health, to make it his first object. Perhaps, he might not have been altogether so satisfied in his new, though temporary home, but that he had brought with him some most important ingredients, as regarded his happiness, in the shape of Mrs. Graham and her three girls, who had now no necessity for remaining at Wingfield, as Charlie was gone to a public school. Without them, it might have been a very difficult task to persuade the Admiral to move, but the idea of giving Susan the opportunity of visiting exhibitions, and Isabella the advantage of music lessons, and brightening Anna's quick intellect by lectures and sight-seeing, was a temptation not to be resisted; and, infirm though he was, and with a constitution evidently breaking, the old Admiral's



energy shot up like the gleam of a dying lamp, as he made his arrangements for a spring in London.

Nearly two years had gone by since the Christmas which immediately succeeded Claude Egerton's election. Two dull and stagnant years externally; but they had left their trace upon the Admiral's wrinkled brow. The working of the inward mind will do that as well as the pressure of outward trials; and Admiral Clare was always hoping, always restless, even when he thought and called himself quite put aside from the world, a confirmed invalid, and a martyr to the gout. His manner had lost none of its quickness, though his tone was lower, and his voice weaker. He had grown a little more deaf, and this tended to increase the irritability which was natural to him. But he strove much against it. He was always striving in some way for something in which he thought he might do better; and he showed his efforts as plainly as a child might.

"Well; and what are you after this morning?" was his half hasty, half good-humoured inquiry of Mrs. Graham, when she came into his study, as usual, about eleven o'clock, to inquire what kind of breakfast he had made. "Jennings will be here presently, and I thought you were going to stay at home and see him?"

"Half-past three is his hour, my dear sir, and there will be time enough for us to do all our shopping and have luncheon, besides, long before that."

"You women are always shopping; one would think that you had mines of Golconda at command. What is it you want?"

The question was a prelude to insisting upon paying for every thing; a fancy which Mrs. Graham was obliged continually to combat. She evaded an answer by saying that they were only trifles,—pencils, paper, and such things. Mr. Egerton had recommended them where to go.

"And he means to go with you, I suppose. What a dangler he is!"

"He has not quite time to spare for buying pencils," said Mrs. Graham. "I told him so, and he acknowledged it."

"You are always sending him to the right about, Frances. Poor young fellow! he's lonely enough; and you won't let him have the home he might have."

"He is always full of engagements," said Mrs. Graham; "and you would be the first to scold him if he did not attend to them."

"Perhaps I should. I'm given to scolding about most things. I was cross to him twice yesterday, but I mean to ask his pardon to-day."

"I don't think he is coming here to-day," observed Mrs. Graham.

"Not coming! What's that for? But never mind." And the Admiral squeezed his left hand with his right, as he often did when he felt inclined to be pettish.

"He said he should be late at the House last night, and he had to meet some one about the Education Bill this afternoon. I brought you the 'Times' with the report of his speech last night; not a very long one,—his never are,—but very much to the purpose."

The Admiral was mollified; he took the paper and wiped his spectacles. Mrs. Graham ventured another piece of information. "Dr. Jennings has sent in the 'Morning Post.' I see by it that Lady Augusta has come up rather earlier than she talked of doing. They were at a grand party last night; I forget where."

"Humph!" The Admiral did not trust himself to any more open expression of his feelings.

"And we have had an invitation to a literary soirée, given by Miss Manners," continued Mrs. Graham.

"Literary folly! That woman is enough to drive away *any little sense one may* chance to have. Are you going?"

"I am not sure. Miss Manners is not very much to our taste; and it is generally disappointing to see lions and lionesses when they are brought out for show. They make me think of children, of two years old, brought down stairs and told to talk, and turning sulky."

"I suppose Lady Augusta's party was a dinner, not a ball," said the Admiral, sarcastically. He had evidently paid but little attention to Mrs. Graham's last remark.

"No, a dance; so the 'Morning Post' says."

"I thought she had given up the sin of dancing, and taken to eating and drinking instead," said the Admiral. "That was what people always did in my days when they professed to take a decidedly religious turn."

"Eating and drinking is the sin now," said Mrs. Graham; "and dancing is an innocent recreation."

"With prayers twice a day as an accompaniment," said the Admiral. "Ah, Frances; you and I are not good enough for this world."

"Church is a great rest; in London especially," said Mrs. Graham.

"Rest! Do you think Lady Augusta goes there for rest?" exclaimed the Admiral. "She is one of those who can't take religion without sauce; and she dresses it up now, till you don't know which is the religion and which the excitement that flavours it."

"But one must hope there is some reality in it," said Mrs. Graham.

"I was born without hope," said the Admiral.

Mrs. Graham looked grave, and answered, "It always gives me pain to talk about her."

"So it does me," replied the Admiral; "only I speak it all out, and then it's over. But I mean to be charitable; yes, I really do mean it; only, don't mention her name *again*." He paused for a moment, and added: "Miss Helen *doesn't take to church-going* too, I suppose."

"Poor Helen! I wish I could tell anything that she would take to," said Mrs. Graham.

"She has a hard life of it now, I suspect," said the Admiral, looking up keenly at Mrs. Graham.

"Lady Augusta does not easily forget," was the reply.

"Nor forgive. She has a punishment in store, you may be certain of that. Oh! Frances,"—and the Admiral raised his hand, and gave effect to his words, by striking it on the table,—“what an escape for Claude!”

"I wish I could be quite sure of that," replied Mrs. Graham.

"What! would you have had him marry the girl after all her vagaries?"

"I would not venture to wish things altered; yet one thing is quite evident, that Claude is not happy."

"Because he doesn't know how to value his own good luck. You don't mean to say that he is hankering after Helen Clare still?"

"No; if he were, he would have made some attempts at reconciliation; and he has made none: he told me that himself. The charm once broken, it was broken for ever. But he has had a great shock."

"And he deserves it. Claude Egerton is as sensible a man as you would wish to find in other matters; but when he fell in love with that giddy-pated girl, he was the greatest idiot in Christendom. A child of two years old could have taught him better."

"If it were only a shock as regarded Helen," replied Mrs. Graham, "it might be of less consequence; but it has given him an impression about all young girls."

"A true one, perchance," said the Admiral; "they are a slippery race."

"Papás and mammas make them slippery, very often," replied Mrs. Graham. "If Helen had been left to her own

unbiased feelings, she would never have accepted Claude so hastily ; and, therefore, never would have given him up so easily."

"She behaved very ill," said the Admiral.

"Very ! I make no excuse for her, except——"

"What except ? You have an exception for every one except me ; you put me down as the most prejudiced old fellow alive."

"Put persons in a false position, and they must irritate each other," replied Mrs. Graham ; "that was the first mistake."

"Men tumble into love, and women walk into it, I suppose," said the Admiral, thoughtfully : "any how it is a happy thing for Claude, that he has tumbled out again : only you declare that he is not happy."

"I don't say that he is unhappy ; he is too good and useful for that. I doubt if people are ever thoroughly unhappy when they feel, that if they were taken away from the world they would be missed and wanted. But he seems to me to have lost all his light-heartedness."

"He never had very much of it."

"I think he had in a certain way. If he was not light-hearted himself, he could throw himself into the mirth of others. But that is gone now ; he is a thorough man of business."

"And well for him that he is. After all, Frances, what is love worth ?" and the Admiral laughed with effort.

"Heaven will tell us, I suppose," replied Mrs. Graham ; "for it will live there, if it is true love." And as the Admiral seemed unwilling to speak again, she added, "Claude will be better when Helen is married."

"Then the report is true ?" said the Admiral, looking up, quickly.

"I don't know as to Captain Mordaunt ; I suppose that

is mere report ; he is too silly, though he is heir to an earldom. But Lady Augusta will scarcely be contented to go through another London season without something decisive."

"I wish she would be quick about it then," said the Admiral, sharply : "it is too bad making poor Claude miserable still."

"Nay, my dear sir, it is not Lady Augusta's fault, or any person's. It is simply the result of unfortunate circumstances. All I meant was, that something of regret will often linger in a man's mind, even when real feeling is gone ; and that the sight of Helen, unmarried, must tend to bring back painful recollections."

"But they have never met yet, have they ? You know they went to Scotland to avoid him at first ; and last year there was the sea ; and when he came down to me last autumn she was away too."

"No, I don't think they have met, or Helen would have given me some idea of it. But her letters lately have been full of one topic, the wearisomeness of life."

"She'll soon get rid of that feeling in the London whirl."

"Or it will make the wearisomeness more weary," said Mrs. Graham. "I long sometimes to draw her away from the set she mixes with, and bring her amongst ourselves : but she is very fanciful ; I never know what will suit her. She was very much taken, some time since, with a new acquaintance she made last year, a Madame Reinhard, a German lady ; Miss Manners, I think, introduced them ; and she stayed at Ivors for a fortnight. I don't know whether the fancy has lasted."

"I see you want to put her in Claude's way again," said the Admiral, rather hastily.

"No, indeed ; it would be so exceedingly awkward : though, I believe, there would be no fear for him ; his idol is destroyed."

"Don't trust to it," exclaimed the Admiral; "once a fool, twice a fool! I won't have her here." He spoke with angry determination.

Mrs. Graham hastened to assure him, that it was no real plan or wish of hers, merely a passing idea, to which she saw as many objections as he could himself.

"Mrs. Mordaunt, or Countess of ——— what is it? Change Alley! She may come then," said the Admiral, laughing.

Mrs. Graham did not laugh. She took out her watch, and said it was time to go out, if they wished to return for luncheon. But the Admiral would not give up his joke, and declared he would send congratulations to Lady Augusta, and promise to dance at the wedding.



## CHAPTER XLVI.

MRS. GRAHAM was right; Claude Egerton had become completely a man of business. "A most useful fellow! capital on Committees! Always to be depended upon!" were the golden opinions which he was winning daily; and others, more valuable, were in process of formation. Claude only wanted time to give himself confidence; and then his calm-judging, deep, comprehensive mind, would be certain to make its way. He felt it; he knew that he was gaining ground in public estimation, and the knowledge, to a certain extent, pleased him. A year before, it might at once have awakened his ambition; but a change had passed over Claude: life and its interests had become vapid. He worked diligently, sometimes with apparent excitement, but it was because work was a necessity to keep him from loneliness.

He was unutterably lonely. His was the solitude of the heart's bitterness, and there is none so dreary. There were no day-dreams now to fill his imagination, no visions of home and domestic comfort to cheer him in his solitary hours. The light on the hearth was extinguished, the chambers were desolate; and he had lost all hope, and for the time even all wish, of restoring the joys gone by. Helen had often been the cause of suffering to others by neglect and thoughtlessness in the course of her short life; but of all injuries attributable to her, none more needed repentance than that which she had inflicted upon Claude, when she shook his trust in her truth.

It is impossible to calculate the evil we do when we destroy or even weaken faith in goodness, under any form. Claude could have borne to be rejected, he would even have thanked Helen for setting herself free, if the tie by which she was bound had been irksome; but the manner in which they had been parted lingered by him as an incurable wound. Perhaps he had never till then realised how weak, and thoughtless, and inconsistent a woman may be. He had indeed been blind in his affection for Helen; but he was justified, by observation of her character, in his belief that she was essentially true; that her word once given, it would be kept; that she would never act and feel towards him in his absence, as she would scorn to do in his presence. Upon this conviction he had based his love; and by one moment of wilfulness the spell was broken; and he saw her not only divested of the charms which he had delusively pictured, but even of those which she really possessed. He did her injustice; and not only so, but he was unjust also to others for her sake. He was becoming indifferent, and secretly cynical, towards women in general. He forgot that it was his own weakness which had made him imagine Helen different from what *she really was*. He thought she had deceived him,



and he believed that others would do the same. And so his standard of a woman's excellence was insensibly lowered. The fact was shown in his every-day life. He sought the society of men, and occupied himself only with their pursuits; and when the great need of his nature, the craving for sympathy and tenderness, made him dissatisfied with the feeling which he obtained from them, he shrank back into himself, disgusted with life even at its outset, and conscience-stricken because he could not at once find in religion and its duties a solace for the loss of earthly happiness.

This at least had been his state of mind before Mrs. Graham came to London. Since then he had found something approaching to his former pleasure in women's society, though he still considered her rather an exception than a rule. She allowed him to be what he was naturally, and never forced him into exertion after happiness. If she had been absent he would have gone frequently to see the Admiral; but it would have been with a secret dread of the old man's surmises and hints, and indirect questionings as to the state of his feelings. But Mrs. Graham was his protection. He could talk to her quite freely, and her ready sympathy gave something like stimulus to the affairs which he had in hand; and she always drew the Admiral's attention away when any thing personal was said. Claude would have been a very frequent guest in Cavendish Square, if Mrs. Graham had allowed it; but she was always urging him to keep up general society, and warning him against becoming morbid; and very often an invitation was accepted, merely because she gave her opinion in its favour.

The Admiral saw this influence, and the old dormant hope revived. He flattered himself that Claude was attracted by Susan. What pleasure, as he sometimes said to himself, could a young man of eight and twenty find in the society of *a woman of fifty*, even though she happened to be Frances

Graham, when there was a pleasant, pretty young girl close at hand, to whom he might devote himself? It was all make-believe, Claude's fancy for Mrs. Graham,—an excuse for coming to see Susan. Mrs. Graham judged more truly. In the present state of Claude Egerton's feelings, there was neither hope nor fear for any young girl, whether pretty or ugly, pleasant or the contrary. He wanted rest and sympathy. A mother, or an aunt, or any near female relative who understood him, would have given it him. And she had taken the place for the time being. Yet she kept him away as much as possible, the reason being more prudence than fear.

Claude came to Cavendish Square, when Lady Augusta Clare had been in London about four days. Mrs. Graham doubted whether he was aware of the fact. Lady Augusta had decided upon coming very suddenly. At one time there was a strange report that she meant to spend the spring in the country, but Mrs. Graham never believed this. The foregoing spring indeed, Lady Augusta had been in London very little; but that was the year after the engagement with Claude was broken off, and Helen had been ill with influenza and general weakness, and sea air had been recommended. It was not likely that the London season would again be interfered with. Whether Lady Augusta considered Helen's wishes or not, there was no doubt what her own would be; and her name in the *Morning Post* was read by Mrs. Graham as a thing of course.

Claude came into the drawing-room, his head more full than usual of Parliamentary matters. An important question was coming on, and possibly ministers would be defeated. He entered at once upon the subject, gave his own opinions, and the outlines of what he should say if he were called upon to speak; and Mrs. Graham listened, and encouraged; and for some time it might have been thought that in Claude's eyes the world only existed for the purpose of settling the disputed *point*.

But there came a pause—a sudden pause—not very unusual now, in the midst of Claude's most interesting conversations. He spoke abruptly to Susan. "Miss Graham, I ought to apologise to you for these politics; they can't be interesting to you."

Isabella answered for her sister. "We all like politics very much, Mr. Egerton."

"And we don't like to be supposed not to understand," asked Anna.

"And we think we understand a good deal more than we do sometimes," said Mrs. Graham, laughing. "I am quite frightened at the turn Anna is taking."

"Susan, you mean, mamma; she reads all the debates."

"To the Admiral," said Susan, quickly.

"And to yourself very often," continued Anna.

"I believe it is the fashion with young ladies to take a political mania at some time or other of their lives," said Claude.

Susan looked up from her work, and asked, "Do you think it only fashion?"

"I suppose it is. I can account for it in no other way. Are you going to Miss Manners' soirée?"

Isabella was again spokeswoman; "We are not sure: are you?"

"Probably; Miss Manners bores me so," he added, addressing Mrs. Graham; "I really think I must go one evening, for the sake of ridding myself of her."

"I suppose she contrives sometimes to get interesting people together," observed Mrs. Graham.

"Yes; but she seldom produces interesting results. Tartaric acid won't effervesce without soda; people forget that."

"Perhaps Miss Manners asked us with the hope of our being the soda," said Mrs. Graham.

Claude smiled faintly, and said he was very conscious of

the soda in his own composition ; his only fear was that it would overpower any amount of acid which might be tried upon it.

"Miss Manners has been waiting some time, I believe, to give this party," observed Mrs. Graham. There was meaning in her tone.

Claude said quietly, "I suppose till Lady Augusta Clare arrived," and then he turned away his head, so that Mrs. Graham was unable to see his face. Still, however, he pursued the subject of the party, addressing himself to Susan. "You would meet some people, Miss Graham, whom you would like,—men who have exerted themselves for the benefit of the lower classes in London ; the difficulty is to make them talk."

"Miss Manners is, I suppose, earnest," said Susan, "She takes up useful things as well as those which are only scientific."

"Yes, so far, she makes one ashamed of oneself : if one could only believe there was no show in it."

"That may be a hard thing to require," said Mrs. Graham.

"True ; women so little know how to manage anything out of the common way." And as the words were uttered, the colour rushed to Claude's cheeks, and he added hastily : "Forgive me ; I really did not mean,—I only thought, that Miss Manners was a little given to show ; but no doubt I am wrong ; she is a very good person I dare say."

Susan was again intent upon her work.

But Claude would not let her rest. He asked, "Do you take an interest in London charities, Miss Graham ?"

He might as well have said, "Do you like balls ?" there would have been just as much heart in the question. And Susan answered coldly, that she had had very few opportunities of hearing *anything* about them.

Claude was not thrown back by her manner. A fit of repentance for his ungraciousness to women was upon him, and he was resolved to make amends. So he began upon the subject of ragged schools, their failures and successes; and from thence proceeded to discuss the general condition of the poor; giving anecdotes and illustrations; and at length the subject engrossed him, and he passed out of the region of cynicism, and became himself again—himself in the olden days.

Several times Mrs. Graham tried to stop him; but it is pleasant to us all to be made conscious of our own identity, by having bygone feelings revived, and Claude liked his conversation for that reason, and continued it, addressing himself now to Mrs. Graham, instead of Susan.

Yet the stern reality of the present came back at last.

Anna's punctuality reminded her that they had visits to pay, and in a pause of the conversation, she rather awkwardly mentioned the fact. Isabella begged her not to talk about them, but Claude instantly took his hat, and apologised for having detained them.

"I had forgotten the visits," said Mrs. Graham; "I don't think they can be very important; only Anna has such a memory for disagreeable duties."

"They will not be all disagreeable," replied Anna; "at least to Susan;" and then she stopped suddenly, as if remembering something that had better not be said.

Claude looked surprised; but Mrs. Graham added directly, "Susan will be very glad to see Helen: only it is doubtful if we shall find her at home."

"To-morrow will do as well," said Susan: she went on with her work, though Anna endeavoured to take it from her.

Claude was most entirely absorbed in moving the position of two little china figures, which stood upon the mantel

piece. He might have been realising Hans Andersen's tales, and giving them imaginary life.

"You had better get ready at once, my dears," said Mrs. Graham; "the carriage was ordered at a quarter to four. Isabella, you are not going; it must be nearly your time for reading to the Admiral." The hint was sufficient; the three girls departed, and Mrs. Graham and Claude were left alone.

Claude turned from his china figures, as soon as the door was closed. His countenance had in those few moments assumed the worn, saddened look, which was now its habitual expression. There was an evident effort, and then he said, "Thank you for mentioning her name naturally; it is what I always wish."

"I thought you did. I saw that you chose to speak of Lady Augusta."

"There is no reason why I should not speak of both," he said, with some bitterness.

"Except that it might be painful."

"It ought not to be; it is——." He could not finish the sentence, and the china figures were again his resource. Then he went on with a rapidity which did not allow a pause for self-recollection: "I have wished very much to talk to some one; no one will understand me as well as you. It is all over; quite. You must not for an instant think it is not; because I don't always command myself. It was a dream. I was rudely awakened; but no matter for that. I beg you and all my friends not to spare me. I don't intend to spare myself. I shall not shun——" a momentary choking in the throat stopped him; he began again, "I shall not shun Helen——"

Mrs. Graham gave him her hand, and he held it as he added, "The sooner we learn to meet in public the better."

"*Perhaps so,*" said Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully; "*though Helen can never see you without self-reproach.*"

He answered quickly, "The first wrong was mine. I did not accept her own words."

"Yet I should like you to feel that she is sorry."

A change came over his countenance. He shrank from the word as if he had been stung.

"The expression sounds cold," said Mrs. Graham.

"I don't want her to be sorry; I would rather she should not think about me."

"Not in the way of repentance?"

He looked up gravely, and answered, "Yes, in that way, if—" the words came slowly,—“if it might be.” There was a long pause of consideration on both sides, and Claude once more took up his hat, and departed.



## CHAPTER XLVII.

VERY handsome, but rather sombre, was Lady Augusta Clare's house in Grosvenor Place. It had lately been fitted up especially to meet her wishes. She liked little singularities; and when all the world took a fancy to gilding and bright colours, it was a mark of quiet and independent taste to be devoted to drab, crimson, and oak. And the sober hue of the mansion was in accordance with what might have been called Lady Augusta's present tone of mind, if her mind had really possessed any tone of its own, and had not simply echoed that of others. Severity was now her profession; severity in manners, music, literature, and art. Dinner parties, balls, and concerts, were given as in former days, but always with a lamentation over the necessity. Her dress was magnificent, but the silks and satins were brown or grey. She lavished a fortune upon ornaments for her person

and her house, but they had always, as she sometimes was heard to say, a religious tendency. Symptoms of all this might have been remarked in her before, but the characteristics were now strongly developed. They might have been traced in her features. The sharp nose was sharpened, the lines of the mouth were more deeply indented, and the words which were uttered escaped with increased force from the compressed lips. But it was the forehead which perhaps indicated the most plainly the peculiarities of Lady Augusta's present character. It had a settled censuring frown, which yet only served to enhance the striking impression made by her countenance. It was one remarkable thing about Lady Augusta Clare, that whatever belonged to her, whether it was natural or acquired, suited her. As she had been formerly the blindest and most condescending, so was she now the handsomest, most dignified, as well as the most severe of matrons; and the frown, instead of appearing as an indication of temper, was simply the result of that mournful quick-sightedness in regard to human weakness, which was the natural consequence of her own exalted virtues.

Probably if it had not assumed that character it would ere this have been smoothed away. No one was a better judge of the effect produced by her own appearance than Lady Augusta Clare.

Helen and Lady Augusta were a great contrast as they sat together in a small, rather dark room, adjoining the drawing-room, filled with books and some few good paintings of a sacred cast. Lady Augusta, in her dark purple dress, almost black; very tall, very upright, very well satisfied with herself, with enough to do and to think of;—Helen, dressed in a light blue muslin, pale, languid, listless; a shadow of her former self, reclining in an easy chair, and appearing scarcely to have power to turn over the pages of a novel. Both were *reading*, or appearing to read; but Lady Au-



gusta's eye steadily followed line after line a volume of religious biography, whilst Helen discursively wandered from one page to another, often passing over several together, and occasionally looking at the end.

Presently Lady Augusta said : " Helen, is that all you intend to do this morning ? "

" Yes ; till Madame Reinhard comes," was Helen's short reply.

" I thought you were going to study history for her ? "

" I may after she has been here ; I can't begin for myself."

" But you can acquire facts," said Lady Augusta.

" I don't want facts, but philosophy," replied Helen. " I don't think you quite understand, mamma."

" One thing I can quite understand, Helen ; that you are wasting your time."

" It is useless to attempt to control one's mind," said Helen ; " if it won't think, it won't. Madame Reinhard will set me to work."

" And occupy you all day," said Lady Augusta. " This German mania is carried too far ; it must be stopped."

" If there is truth in it," said Helen : " it will be impossible to stop it."

For the first time she spoke in her natural, eager tone. Before, the words were dragged from her.

" Madame Reinhard's ideas are dangerous," said Lady Augusta ; " she loses herself in labyrinths."

" So does Miss Manners," answered Helen.

" Not in the same way," replied Lady Augusta. " Her theories are only theories."

" And Madame Reinhard's are carried into practice," exclaimed Helen. " Give me practice, not theory."

" And yet the moment I introduce a practical person to you, you shrink back," said Lady Augusta

"Never from the practice," said Helen, coldly; "only from the unreality."

"I don't know what you mean by unreality, Helen. It is a cant phrase of the present day."

"I don't know any other to use," replied Helen, indifferently. "Mamma, we need not go on talking in this way."

"I beg your pardon, Helen. As I am responsible for your views, I wish to comprehend them."

"I have no views, mamma; only I hate narrowness and pettiness."

"Going to church and being reverential, for instance," said Lady Augusta.

"Making goodness consist in such things as this," said Helen; taking up an elaborate piece of work intended as the border of an altar carpet.

"I make no answer to your sneers, Helen. I am accustomed to them. But since you are so bent upon being practical, I will put your principle to the test. You will go to Miss Manners' soirée?"

"If Madame Reinhard intends to be there," replied Helen.

Lady Augusta's cold eye sparkled, as she exclaimed: "If it is my will, you mean."

"Then," replied Helen, "there could be no need to put the question to me."

"Yet I was willing to give you the opportunity of pleasing me by your own free will."

"I have none, mamma."

"None! when every hour in the day you exhibit it?"

"None," repeated Helen. "If I had, I should not be here."

"You don't mean, Helen, that you still cling to that absurd fancy of remaining at Ivors; now, when I have made, and am daily *making*, such sacrifices for you?"

"I wish for no sacrifice but one, mamma; to be left alone."

"To brood over fancies, and waste your powers in metaphysics," exclaimed Lady Augusta.

"As well in that as in gold thread and floss silk," said Helen, again pointing to the border of the altar carpet.

"To be the mark for ridicule," continued Lady Augusta; her words being uttered with greater sharpness. "To make yourself disagreeable to the persons whom your father and I most desire you to please. To rehearse again, in fact, the part which has been your public disgrace."

Helen roused herself from her leaning attitude and paused before she spoke; then she said, "Mamma, you need have no fear on that point. I shall never treat another man as I treated Claude."

"I should be glad to think so," replied Lady Augusta. "You will then be more willing to listen to what your father and I have to say."

"Is it anything particular, mamma?" asked Helen, abruptly; whilst she moved so as to face Lady Augusta, and regarded her with a steady and fixed gaze.

"I am doubtful whether I ought to tell you; but it may be as well to be open. Captain Mordaunt has proposed for you to your father."

"Has he?" said Helen. Not a muscle of her face moved.

"He has," replied Lady Augusta, emphatically. "He has behaved as few men in his circumstances would have done; he has placed himself entirely in your father's hands."

"He is wise in that," said Helen. "He may have hope with my father: he would have none with me."

"You are ungrateful, Helen."

"I see no ingratitude."

"Not in the way in which you receive the offer of *affection*?"

"If it were affection, I would be grateful for it," replied Helen. "But, as it happens, I can appreciate exactly the value of Captain Mordaunt's professions. He has known me some time, and likes me in a certain way. He thinks I am not absolutely ugly or dull. It pleases him to hear me sing; and we can carry on a sufficiently lively conversation in a ball-room. Moreover, our families are connected, and I am likely to have a tolerable fortune. Altogether, he thinks that I shall some day make a very presentable Countess of Harford. I may be conceited, mamma, but I estimate myself rather above all this; therefore I am not grateful, but the contrary."

"Helen, your satire is really unbearable."

"I am sorry for it: but, unfortunately, truth is often the greatest satire. My father, I suppose, is quite prepared for my answer."

"None is required," replied Lady Augusta. "Captain Mordaunt asks only that he may be admitted to the house to endeavour to make his own way: that, of course, you could not refuse."

"It is indifferent to me," replied Helen. "Whether one man or another may choose to pay me attentions can be of little consequence, except for the trouble of the moment." She took out her watch. "Half past twelve. Madame Reinhard will be here directly."

Lady Augusta detained her as she was about to leave the room. Helen thought she was going to speak again of Captain Mordaunt; but no notice was taken of the last remark, and Lady Augusta only said: "I have accepted the invitation for Miss Manners' soirée. I mean to drive to Curzon Street after church this afternoon, and then I shall learn who are likely to be present. I should wish you, therefore, to go out with me."

"The carriage may call for me when you return from church," said Helen.

"It will take up time," replied Lady Augusta.

"Only five minutes; and I have engagements till then."

"With Madame Reinhard?"

"It may be; I can't answer for it."

"I wish to know," said Lady Augusta.

Helen's cheek flushed with anger. "Yes, with Madame Reinhard," she said; and Lady Augusta allowed her to go.



## CHAPTER XLVIII.

HELEN would scarcely have been supposed to be the same person, if—about a quarter of an hour after her conversation with Lady Augusta—she had been seen sitting by the side of Madame Reinhard, and looking over the same book with her. She had been sharply on the defensive during that uncomfortable interview with her step-mother; all the worst points of her character standing out in strong relief, as they always did when she was brought in contact with Lady Augusta. We all, so it seems, exercise distinct influences upon each other, and call forth more or less some peculiar characteristics, either congenial or antagonistic. Lady Augusta, of late, had done this in a very marked way. She roused Helen to opposition, even when there was nothing to oppose. It was a struggle for supremacy between two strong wills; but Lady Augusta added knowledge of the world to hers, and so in most cases it was victorious. Besides, she had in general Right on her side. Her faults lay much more in motive than in action; and although this effectually prevented her from having any influence over Helen, whose perception of truth in character was almost an instinct, it gave her generally the support of Sir Henry's judgment, and

the approbation of the circle in which she moved; and against these it was very difficult for Helen to contend.

But Helen was at her ease now; all the cold petulance of manner, so offensive from its want of respect, was gone. She was caressing, gentle, deferential, and full of eager interest, and her affectionate cordiality was, in appearance, fully returned. Madame Reinhard might have been thirty, but she was young-looking for her age. Her countenance was very handsome at a distance; on a nearer view it had great defects, for the features were irregular; but the look of wonderful intelligence in the square forehead, and clear, dark grey eyes, almost forbade criticism. It was a face which took the beholder, as it were, by storm, and compelled admiration. Then she had the charm of a foreign manner and foreign accent. Even trifling observations became piquant when uttered by her; and when she passed into the region of thought, her whole soul seemed to pour itself out in a rush of earnest, though sometimes vague, and wild speculations, which, even if Helen could not follow them, entranced her by the fascination of power and eloquence.

No wonder that Helen was giving herself up to this new influence; she, whose life had lately been so vapid and monotonous, whose temper was becoming sharpened by domestic uncongeniality, and at the bottom of whose heart lay self-reproach, disappointed hope, and a restless longing for some unattainable joy; a heavy, heavy burden, which deadened the present, and buried the past as under the weight of a gravestone.

It was something to feel that she could be excited, though but for a few hours; it was much more to believe that her mind was enlarging to receive new and valuable ideas; that she was learning to search into mysteries, and emancipate herself from prejudice.

Madame Reinhard taught her to think, and any person

who does that, is felt at once to be a benefactor. And so Helen cultivated her acquaintance, at first from curiosity, then from real pleasure, now from affection. The enjoyment of her society was the only real gratification to which she had looked forward in coming to London, and even that would, she imagined, have been enhanced tenfold, if Madame Reinhard could have been prevailed upon to stay with her at Ivors, instead of remaining amongst the gay, dissipated friends, whom her husband,—a man of scientific tastes, but devoted to self-indulgence,—was in the habit of collecting around him.

“Beautiful! it raises one’s whole nature! If one could only feel so always!” was Helen’s exclamation, as Madame Reinhard read, with perfect emphasis and taste, a scene from Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso*; “but one forgets often that it is possible.”

“Ah! *meine Liebe*! that is true; but the sense of the beautiful deepens as the perception of it expands; and so one learns to live a life above life.”

“But not in the midst of such pettiness as is found in this London whirl.”

“Why not? The real beauty of humanity is the same every where. One has but to dig beneath the surface to find it. There are hearts to love in London as there are elsewhere. And intellect—where will you find the like?”

“You have the power to find,” said Helen; “you know where and how to search.”

“And so will you, *meine Freunde*! only let your soul open, expand itself. It is contracted now, it is shut up, it cannot see; it is fenced in by forms, by exclusiveness, by conventionalities; that is what you call them. Listen, see what forms the noble mind.

“ ‘Ein edler Mensch kann einem engen Kreise  
Nicht seine Bildung danken ; Vaterland  
Und Welt muss auf ihn wirken. Ruhm und Tadel  
Muss er ertragen lernen. Sich und andre  
Wird er gezwungen recht zu kennen. Ihn  
Wiegt nicht die Einsamkeit mehr schmeichelnd ein,  
Es will der Feind—es darf der Freund nicht schonen.  
Dann übt der Jüngling streitend seine Kräfte ;  
Fühlt was er ist, und fühlt sich bald ein Mann.’ ”

“ Yes,” and Helen’s eyes sparkled with enthusiasm,  
“ and if I were a man, it might be.”

“ Ach ! that is the narrowness—soul is soul—be it man  
or woman’s.”

Helen sighed.

“ Nay, *mein Kind*, why sigh ? It is but to strive, to  
struggle, perhaps to wait ; truth will have the victory at last.  
The world is working for it : women are not what they were ;  
they are making a position for themselves ; their voices are  
raised even now ; they appeal for liberty, and it will be  
granted them. As the regeneration of the world approaches,  
the dimness is passing from the eyes of men, and they are  
learning to acknowledge in us the same being which lives  
and works in themselves.”

“ You are free,” said Helen. “ Even now you have  
marked out your own path, and are following it.”

“ Free ! But the freedom would never have been bought,  
if I had paused to reckon the price to be paid for it.” Mad-  
ame Reinhard stopped for a moment, and a cloud of sorrow-  
ful thought passed over her countenance. “ Yet,” she  
added, “ I am content.”

Helen pressed her hand affectionately, and said : “ You  
know I would help you if I could.”

“ Ah ! yes, I know ; but none can. I must keep it to  
myself ; but I say again, I am content. That is what you  
will be, if you give yourself up to the true instincts of your



nature ; then you will always find companionship in the union of soul with soul, abroad, though you may fail to meet with it at home."

"But there are so few who could give me this companionship," said Helen. "I know none except yourself."

"Come with me, *meine Liebe*. I will show you. I will make you feel what mind can be ; what it can work ; how it can rise above this earthly atmosphere ; how it can expand itself, and find communion with the great and good of all ages."

"I am a prisoner," said Helen ; "I go nowhere without mamma."

"Oh ! Miladi Augusta ! she is very careful ; very good ; but she is narrow, narrow ; you must not be shut in by her. Nothing great will flourish in that air."

"Nothing does," said Helen ; "it sickens me ; I can't live in it."

"Assuredly not ; you were made for another life."

"I see through it," continued Helen. "Mamma calls it religion ; it is no religion to me."

"Religion ! no, indeed," and Madame Reinhard's eyes were lighted up by excitement ; "is not religion pure, free, the adoration of the heart,—the voluntary homage of the whole being ? It cannot be confined by forms ; it needs no mystic rites. Give but to the conscious soul the sense of beauty and love, and it will worship everywhere. Whether standing on high, amongst the glorious mountains, or deep hidden in the secluded valley, it will recognise greatness, majesty, and power, and prostrate itself before them. And if nature is concealed from its gaze, it will search amongst the human hearts, amongst which it dwells, and see there also the same attributes of divinity, and acknowledge the same might."

Helen understood only a little of this speech, yet some-

thing in the latter sentence startled her, and she said, "One can scarcely speak of divinity in men."

"Not genius? not the undying spark, which is to kindle soul after soul for ages yet to come?" exclaimed Madame Reinhard. "Oh Helen, are you false to that creed?"

"No, indeed," exclaimed Helen; "genius is what I long to meet; it is what I pine after. But where is it to be found, except in books?"

"You do not know, *meine Freunde*; as you say you are a prisoner; but they live still,—the men whose spirits shall work for centuries yet to come, even as he,—this great one, to whom we have now paid homage." She laid her hand upon the book which they had been reading.

"Mamma scoffs at Goethe," said Helen. "She says he was a bad man."

"*Mein armes Kind!* and, are you to walk in leading strings all your life? What matters the outward life, when the inward heart is pure? And why deny the majesty of genius, because it comes to us in a form which we are unaccustomed? Ah! the world is blind, blind."

"And you could show me men who would have power to stir my soul as he can stir it?" asked Helen, doubtfully.

"He was one, alone—we do not look for a second; we would not wish it; it would mar the grandeur of his power. But there are others,—men, aye, and women too;—come but with me, and you shall know them. They may not suit Miladi Augusta; they would not drive every day to kneel on a hard bench, in a cold church, and hear little boys groan out dull tunes without time: and they might never bow their bodies down to the ground as a sign of reverence; and, perchance, they don't know how to work the odd flowers and strange stitches, which Miladi values only just next to her prayers. But I will tell you what they will do, Helen. They will elevate you; they will make you feel what life is

worth : they will carry you beyond these outward customs, they will teach you to recognise the presence of the good and the beautiful in all ; and they will show you how to work for freedom,—your own freedom, mine, the freedom of women, of mankind ; the emancipation of the human race from every rule but that of mind, directed by benevolence.”

“ You are imagining a perfect state of things,” replied Helen, thoughtfully.

“ And is not the world working towards perfection ? Look back upon past ages. That is what I want you to do ; you should read history philosophically ; see how mankind has progressed. We talk of the days of chivalry ; were there not hardships then, and slavery, and cruelty, such as are never heard of now ? ”

“ Yes,” said Helen ; “ that has often struck me.”

“ And it will strike you more, if you will only think ; only suffer yourself to think. But you are a coward, Helen ; you are afraid to cast off your chains, and give an independent opinion.”

“ Because I am always having them recast around me,” answered Helen. “ Mamma dreads freedom. She says we ought to put ourselves under guidance in all things, and that submission and obedience are the first of duties.”

“ Oh ! yes, obedience to one’s own high instincts—submission to the mighty power of mind ; but with Miladi Augusta it is not so ; it is submission to—I don’t know what.”

“ Submission to herself, as far as I am concerned,” said Helen, pettishly.

“ Poor child ! ” Madame Reinhard became caressing ; “ but it will not last, Helen.”

“ I don’t see how it is to end.”

“ Before long you will marry. Then you will be free.”

Helen’s colour changed. She answered quickly, “ I shall never marry.”

"Never! oh! such a long day!" and Madame Reinhard laughed.

"I should not be happier if I were married," continued Helen.

"You would be more free," was the quick reply.

"No, no," began Helen, but she was interrupted.

"Suffer me to speak, *meine Freunde*. I have more right to do so than you. It is your English laws,—your English customs which make it so. It would not be if women were independent, as they ought to be, and as they must and will be. But now you are tied; you cannot move, unless you profess to have given up your freedom to a husband; then you are your own mistress, or at least you may make yourself such."

"Profess!" repeated Helen, thoughtfully. The word jarred upon her sense of truth.

A slight sneer passed over Madame Reinhard's face. "You are so fanciful, *mein Kind*. What is in your little mind?"

"That, if people profess, I suppose they are bound to practise," said Helen, "though I should never like it."

"Ah! that old-fashioned notion! it dates from the deluge. But, *meine Liebe*, the world has grown wiser since those days. We obey where we love, that I grant you."

"And women are supposed always to love their husbands," said Helen.

Madame Reinhard's answer was a kiss, so fond that the shade which had gathered upon Helen's face vanished. She turned again to Goethe, and her full, melodious voice carried Helen on, as in a dream of enchantment, whilst they read of love and genius, high aspirations, and mournful passionate struggles against suffering and oppression. So naturally was all described, so entirely were the feelings depicted considered to be matters of course, that, Helen, in her simplicity,

never paused to inquire whether underneath there lay the recognition of God's moral law. Nothing offended her taste; she did not ask, therefore, whether anything ought to offend her principles; and when Madame Reinhard concluded by an eloquent eulogium upon Goethe, Helen was quite prepared to agree with her, and to believe that Lady Augusta's condemnation was to be traced entirely to, what Madame Reinhard termed, her narrowness.



## CHAPTER XLIX.

HELEN had many such conversations with Madame Reinhard. They all ended in a similar way, with no definite results, at least none which could be perceived; only Helen grew more discontented, more abstracted, more wilful, and, when alone, more unhappy. Madame Reinhard's society was a species of intoxication; it excited her for the moment, but it left depression and restlessness behind. Helen thought that it was because in her alone she could find congeniality, and therefore she was always forming plans for meeting; and when they did meet, either in public or private, devoting herself to her, to the exclusion of all other interests.

Lady Augusta complained, and put difficulties in the way; but she had no arguments to bring forward against the friendship strong enough to convince Helen's reason. She had encouraged the acquaintance at first, because Madame Reinhard had the reputation of talent and fashion; and now, all that she could say against her was refuted by the very words which she had herself used when it was proposed that she should visit Ivors.

Yet Lady Augusta had right on her side,—more right than even she herself entirely understood. One thing only she knew,—the discovery had been made quite recently, since she came to London;—the society which met at Madame Reinhard's house was not such as she could herself tolerate, or with which Helen could ever be allowed to mix.

Where the fault lay no one seemed to know. Madame Reinhard said it was in her husband; that she was obliged to submit to his will; that she did so most unwillingly: and her lamentations, added to her talents, and the fascination of her manners, induced the indifferent and selfish world to accept her apologies, and to believe that she was a victim to her husband's tyranny.

But Lady Augusta's professions of religion and strictness of conduct could not thus be satisfied. It was against her will that Madame Reinhard was Helen's friend, yet not in the least because she feared the influence of her principles. It was simply because in the set amongst which it was her pleasure to move the acquaintance was condemned. Madame Reinhard was looked upon coldly by certain persons, the leaders of Lady Augusta's religious world;—a great deal was said of the mischief of latitudinarian principles; hints given of tendency to scepticism, and anecdotes related of the neglect of all outward religious observances in Madame Reinhard's household. Helen believed nothing of all this. She declared that it was religious gossip, which she hated much more than that which was worldly. Now and then she repeated the stories to Madame Reinhard, who received them as matters of course, and answered them either by a quiet smile of contempt, or an eloquent tirade against narrow-mindedness.

It would have been difficult, indeed, for Helen to doubt her; she had such a flow of words at command,—such high-sounding phrases and plausible excuses. And then her sym-

pathies were so large ! She seemed the very personification of charity. There was no form of belief or unbelief which she could not tolerate, except that which, in the slightest degree, attempted to put bounds to toleration. And this was very charming to Helen, who was daily learning from Lady Augusta to consider that all persons who endeavoured to limit the range of truth were bent upon destroying its essence, and making it to consist in certain mysterious outward ceremonies, in which the heart had no share. True, Madame Reinhard was seldom or never seen at any place of public worship, except the Roman Catholic, which she sometimes frequented, as she openly confessed, for the sake of the music ; but who could deny that it is possible to worship quite as devoutly in the solitude of one's own chamber as in the most splendid cathedral ? And Madame Reinhard could speak, and did speak, so fervently upon the most solemn subjects,—communion with the Supreme Being—dependence upon Him—thirsting after union with His exalted Nature,—that Helen naturally concluded any eccentricities in outward conduct to be the result of education and foreign habits. She had no doubt in her own mind that there was much more real feeling in Madame Reinhard's religion than in Lady Augusta's, and much more spirituality (the term was vague, but it expressed to herself what she meant) than in Mrs. Graham's.

Madame Reinhard's singularities were also confessed openly. She owned that she held some singular opinions about the Bible,—that is, they would have been singular in former days,—but they were now, as she asserted, rapidly becoming general. She talked of myths, and allegories, and quoted Niebuhr and the legends of the early Roman kings, by way of illustration ; but then she admired the Bible extremely,—indeed, she was quite enthusiastic about it. There was no poetry, she declared, equal to Isaiah,—nothing to be found in the whole compass of literature grander than certain

descriptions in the Book of Revelations; and, above all,—and it was this acknowledgment upon which she piqued herself, as if it were a homage from her own powerful mind to the force of simplicity and truth,—no life more touching, and no example more inspiring, than that given in the Gospels.

Helen valued the Bible more than she had ever done before, after she had discussed it with Madame Reinhard; and when she saw Lady Augusta drive off in her luxurious carriage to the daily service in a neighbouring church, looked at her with a kind of pitying contempt, and sat down to read at home; lulling herself into a state of dreamy excitement by the melody of her favourite chapters, and believing that she was, if not outwardly as strict, certainly more sincere.

Now and then, however, though only for a moment, Helen was startled by the opinions of her new friend. Madame Reinhard's liberality extended itself to morals as well as religion, and here it was not quite so easy to mislead. Helen's standard of duty might not be high; but, such as it was, it was based upon truth. If she failed to act up to it, yet she never excused herself, and therefore was not inclined to excuse others.

But Madame Reinhard had excuses always ready for herself and every one else, and not only excuses but reasonings, mystifying palliations, sophistical arguments, which confounded the distinctive lines of right and wrong, until it was next to impossible to separate them. And this was at first displeasing to Helen. It gave her an uncomfortable feeling of insecurity. When a man of powerful intellect and great genius, full of the most exalted aspirations, sank himself to the level of the lowest of mankind by a vicious life, and she was told that she had no right to censure, because mind of such a stamp could not be judged by ordinary rules, she yielded to the argument, because she had so little *knowledge of the binding force of the eternal laws of God,*



that she had scarcely anything to say against it. But it was not the sophistry of days or weeks which could satisfy the misgiving of something wrong that rested at the bottom of her heart. Helen believed, only because she wished to believe. In her inmost soul she felt that no genius, be it ever so great, can balance even with a feather's weight the power of moral worth; yet, according to Madame Reinhard's creed, she looked upon genius, even though unconnected with goodness, as an emanation from God, to be revered and worshipped for itself; and as such submitted to its influence, without allowing herself to inquire too minutely into the right upon which its authority was based.

All this was doing her infinite harm; but she was not in the least aware of it. She was unhappy, that she knew, but many sources existed to which this fact might be traced, besides that of an ill-regulated mind.

One there was especially, scarcely acknowledged by Helen, yet ever present with her. Madame Reinhard fostered it insensibly. She was always talking to Helen of love. She looked upon it not only as a necessary ingredient in human happiness, but as essential to the perfection of the human character. Helen often said that she should never marry, yet Madame Reinhard's conversation, added to her own experience, made her feel that, unmarried, she must be miserable; and then she looked round the circle of her acquaintance with a cold, criticising, scornful eye, and the aching of her heart told her that once, love,—true, pure love, such as man might approve, and God would surely bless,—had been placed within her reach, and she had rejected it.

Deeper sadness, deeper regret, lay at the bottom of Helen's heart than Madame Reinhard could reach; but it was all buried, covered day by day, more and more, with the *thick shroud of wilfulness, ignorance, and false principles,*

which Lady Augusta's insincerity and Madame Reinhard's plausibility created and fostered.

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## CHAPTER L.

HELEN consented to go to Miss Manners' *soirée*. Madame Reinhard had promised to be there, and Helen made a virtue of her compliance, although knowing that, under all circumstances, she would in the end have been forced to yield. It was one of a series of entertainments which Miss Manners was endeavouring to bring into fashion. Strictly literary, she called it: tea, coffee, ices, lectures, conversation, and supper. And there were certainly the germs of very agreeable society to be found in it; the misfortune being, as Claude Egerton had suggested, that almost every one wished to exhibit his or her peculiar talents, instead of enjoying those of others. On this occasion, however, there was greater prospect of satisfaction than usual. A lecture was to be given by one with whom no one could compete; a scientific man, and a traveller, who had been working very successfully for the civilisation of a barbarous and heathen people. Madame Reinhard entered warmly into the cause; only lamenting that Mr. Randolph was a little inclined to be narrow in his views, and thought a bishop essential to their success. Her object in going was to become acquainted with him, and discuss the whole question; and Helen, who cared neither for natives, travellers, nor bishops, yet pleased herself with the notion that she might hear agreeable conversation, and witness the triumph of her friend's intellect. She looked forward to the evening at last, with something really *approaching to excitement*; especially when she found

that Mrs. Graham, Susan, and Isabella, tempted like herself by the proposed lecture, were to be there also. Madame Reinhard had not made Helen forget Susan; forgetfulness was not in her nature, and the tie between them had been formed too early, and cemented by too many associations, to be broken, unless by some sudden disruption. They suited, as so many husbands and wives suit, precisely because each possessed what the other wanted. Helen rested upon Susan, and Susan admired and was excited by Helen. Yet they had met but little of late, and always unsatisfactorily. There was no barrier in the way of affection, but there was one as regarded confidence. Helen lived in the present, and deep feeling requires a past. And so they were accustomed to keep upon the surface of all subjects, each conscious of the quicksands which lay beneath.

Helen's eagerness, according to what was now becoming a natural rule, caused Lady Augusta much annoyance; although she had before urged that the invitation should be accepted. It was too provoking that Helen could not even do what was wished, without showing that she was influenced by Madame Reinhard. The feeling was shown in the first observation addressed to Helen when she appeared in the drawing-room to wait for the carriage.

"You are over-dressed, my dear. If we were going to the Duchess of Menteith's ball, you could not be more splendid."

Helen looked at herself carelessly in the glass. "Splendid! am I mamma? I really did not think about it. I told Annette to give me the dress which Madame Reinhard admired so much the other evening, and it never struck me whether it would be particularly suitable or not; but it does not signify."

"But it does signify, Helen, extremely; nothing can be *a greater mark* of bad taste than being over-dressed. I

really wonder that, after the education you have received, you should take delight in such absurd finery."

Helen only laughed. Love of finery was the last thing of which her conscience accused her.

Lady Augusta continued: "And that vulgar German woman to encourage you in it!"

"Nay, mamma," Helen interrupted her quickly: "the vulgar German woman, as you are pleased to call her, has nothing to do with the matter. The dress was worn last week at a ball, and you chose it yourself, and Madame Reinhard praised your taste. It is my own fancy wearing it to-night; and I confess I see nothing splendid in it."

"You are not likely to do so whilst you are so devoted to the world," said Lady Augusta.

Helen again looked at her dress, and smiled satirically. "It would be easy enough to overcome the world, if all that was required was to put on one dress instead of another."

"Signs," said Lady Augusta, "indicative of the spirit within." She glanced complacently at her own sepulchral black satin.

"Merely signs, and so of no consequence!" retorted Helen.

"You are misled, Helen; your mind is perverted by German mysticism. It will lead you into dangerous error."

"I am willing to run the risk," said Helen. "Satin, or brown holland, it is all the same to me, except for the spirit which is embodied in it."

"Spirit! Embodied!" repeated Lady Augusta. "Really Helen, you talk great nonsense."

"Why do you prefer dark colours to light, mamma?" said Helen.

"I am ashamed that you should ask such a childish question. I have a regard to propriety, simplicity; I wish to *show my contempt for the world.*"

"Then that is your spirit, mamma. Mine is to please a person I love. One is of just as much value as the other; and if my friend liked best to see me in brown holland, I would wear it."

The confession struck Lady Augusta dumb for an instant; then she said, with an air of determined authority: "Helen, it is my wish that you should change your dress."

Helen looked up angrily for a moment, but her tone was provokingly indifferent as she replied: "I can just take off this brooch, mamma, if you dislike it. It sparkles too much, I suppose, to please you."

"It is my wish that you should change your dress, Helen," repeated Lady Augusta.

"There is no time, mamma. The carriage is at the door."

Lady Augusta sat down. Helen drew on her gloves. The carriage was announced.

"I will just knock at papa's study, and see if he is ready," said Helen. "He told me he would go if he could."

"There is no use in doing that," replied Lady Augusta; "I am not going."

"Then I dare say he will take me," said Helen, without even an accent of surprise; and as she spoke the words, Sir Henry entered the room.

Lady Augusta appealed to him instantly. "Sir Henry, I must refer to your authority; your daughter is beyond my control."

She stood before the fire, the very embodiment of injured dignity.

Poor Sir Henry was becoming used to these scenes; yet they always perplexed him. He looked from one to the other. Helen went up to him, playfully, and kissed him. "Dear papa, you will go with me to-night; it will be so *much more pleasant* if you do."

"I don't know, my dear; I can't say." He turned away from her. "Augusta, what is all this?"

"Simply that your daughter refuses to recognize my authority," was the reply.

"I can't have you silly, Helen; do as you are told to do."

And Helen, with a proud, careless laugh, answered, "I will, papa, if I know what to do; only the carriage is waiting, and we shall be late."

Sir Henry addressed his wife. "What do you wish, my dear? What is it she refuses to do?"

"I wish her to appear, simply, suitably dressed," said Lady Augusta. "Such finery is fit only for an opera dancer."

Sir Henry's eye glanced quickly over his daughter's figure; but he could see nothing in Helen's handsome but very becoming dress, at all worthy of such censure.

"It is a very good dress. I don't see ——" he began.

Lady Augusta interrupted him with a sigh. "Of course, you don't see, my dear. You can't possibly understand the proprieties of a lady's dress. But I must beg you to believe, upon my assurance, that if Helen appears in such extravagant magnificence at a quiet literary *soirée*, she will be the laughing-stock of the room. But I am free! I have nothing to do with it! I give it up!" Lady Augusta folded her hands together with an air of touching resignation.

"Helen, my dear, go and do what your mamma wishes, directly," said Sir Henry, in the tone which Helen dreaded to disobey. And almost before the sentence was ended, Helen had disappeared—conquered.

## CHAPTER LI.

"Ah! *meine liebe!* and you are come at last? I gave you up. But so dull, so triste! Where is your beauty gone? Annette was asleep when she dressed you." Madame Reinhard had made her way to Helen, by breaking through a crowd of admiring gazers and auditors, who thought her far more interesting than the learned traveller and philanthropist. One or two followed her; amongst them Captain Mordaunt.

Helen's face was clouded: she scarcely answered.

Captain Mordaunt made some silly flattering remark about beauty unadorned, and then the cloud deepened, and Helen drew Madame Reinhard aside.

"For pity's sake save me from personal observations, especially from that man. What does it signify how I look? what I wear? I thought you would have known me better."

Madame Reinhard laughed. "So proud are we, we can't bear even praise! But I like you all the better, *mein Kind*. Only confess you are very sombre to-night; and it is so dazzling to see you when you choose to make the most of yourself."

"I have no choice; I am a puppet," said Helen.

"Ah! Miladi Augusta! she likes that burial gown. But she should not put it upon you; you must rebel."

"I don't care enough about it," said Helen, with assumed indifference. "But don't talk about it; it is an odious subject."

"It is no matter, except for freedom," continued Madame Reinhard, "that weighs upon me, I own. I long to see you *free*."

"Parents before marriage, husbands after; where is the freedom of a woman in England?" said Helen; "unless one can follow the example set one here." And she glanced at the further end of the room, where Miss Manners, in her quaint black jacket and the odd head-dress, half turban, half cap, was haranguing, in long-winded sentences, an audience whose thoughts were centred in their coffee-cups.

"That is not freedom," said Madame Reinhard; her eyes following the same direction. "She is the slave of the world's opinion. She would give up her singularity if people did not bow down before it."

"Then where is freedom to be found?" again asked Helen. "If you say in marriage, I can't agree with you."

Madame Reinhard only smiled. "We will discuss that another time, *meine liebe*. Look! there comes—Is not that your cousin? We saw her in the distance in the park." And Helen leaned forward, trying to distinguish, amidst the crowd near the door, who might be entering. They were silent for a moment: then Madame Reinhard laid her hand upon Helen's arm, and said emphatically, "Remember, whatever I think, I will never acknowledge that hearts can be constrained to love by vows. It is all words,—useless. If they love, they love; and their wills are one. If they don't love, then must each heart be free."

Helen looked round with an expression of surprise and alarm.

Madame Reinhard laughed heartily. "Ah! I shock you! you misunderstand. Of course we all keep to outward forms; we go on very well together, that is necessary. All I mean is, that vows can't make us love if we don't love."

"Then we have no business to marry," said Helen, quickly, and as the words were uttered a pang shot through her heart, caused by mingled feelings and recollections, which she dared not face.



"*Ça depend*," was Madame Reinhard's reply. "Where will you find the hero, the grand one, worthy of you, able also to have you? but are you, therefore, to be a slave to Miladi Augusta, and her burial gown?"

Helen's lips moved as if she would reply, but the answer was unspoken. A sudden paleness overspread her face, and drawing back hastily, she sat down on the nearest chair.

"Ah! what can be the matter? you are ill. Speak, *meine liebe*." Madame Reinhard bent over the chair.

Helen's eyes were fixed upon her eagerly, and entreatingly. "Stand before me, don't let me be seen."

"My child, no, if you would rather not. But what for do you wish to hide yourself?"

A little reproach was to be distinguished in Madame Reinhard's tone, as she found herself in the background, unable to see or be seen. "You should rouse yourself, Helen. See, who is that? Ah! *quel grand homme*!"

A slight movement opened the way before them, and Claude Egerton for the first time caught sight of Helen.

He did not appear startled: she could have bore it better if he had. He drew near with his firm tread, his self-controlled manner; that manner which she had sometimes watched when exhibited to others, and wondered whether it would be possible for any one unacquainted with him to guess the depths of tenderness beneath; and each step seemed to thrill her brain, whilst a mist covered her eyes.

She tried to be brave; she tried to look at him, to meet him, as it seemed he could meet her; but the shame, the overpowering, crushing sense of shame, the remembrance that once—though only in the excitement of goaded feeling—she had forgotten a woman's dignity and truth, was too much for her: and hastily rising from her seat, she made her escape through the crowd to the farther end of the room, followed by Madame Reinhard's frightened look and eager question. "*Helen, meine liebe*, are you mad?"

But Helen thought only of being alone and unnoticed. It was all she cared for, all she longed for—to look at him in the distance, to observe him unperceived: then for an instant there came the strong impulse to throw herself at his feet, and ask him if he could forgive, if he did not utterly despise her, succeeded by the heavy sense of humiliation, which whispered that some offences might be forgiven, but could never, never be forgotten. She sat down, trembling: she thought that she would summon her resolution and speak to him. She watched lest he should again draw near, but the lecture began, and all attention but her own was engrossed by it.

It was interesting from the commencement; towards the conclusion it became absorbing, yet less from the eloquence of the speaker or the facts he narrated, than because his heart was in his subject, and he carried other hearts with him.

When it was ended, a number of persons gathered around the lecturer, Madame Reinhard amongst them. She took a prominent part in the conversation; her bright eyes sparkled with almost dazzling brilliancy, and her changing voice gave utterance to question, remark, and repartee, with wonderful and exciting rapidity. And by her side now stood Helen, no longer humbled, crushed, by the sense of her own littleness, but eager, excited, scarcely inferior to Madame Reinhard in talent, yet exhibiting it as unconsciously as her beauty. Her voice, indeed, trembled at times, when a dark face, almost severe in its expression, was to be seen far in the background; but Helen, when she caught the glance, turned pale for an instant, and then talked only the more rapidly, and laughed the more lightly, for the pang of humiliation was over.

“You have a strange set here to-night, my dear Julia,” remarked Lady Augusta, as, from the elevation of her moral and religious superiority, she condescendingly glanced around the room.

"Men of note! women of high intellectual cultivation!" replied Miss Manners: "not known, it may be, in the fashionable world, but all worthy of acquaintance, though possibly singular."

"Very!" escaped from Mrs. Graham, who happened to be near. "Pray"—and she looked towards the group with rather an anxious eye;—"there is one lady—stout, dressed in amber silk; do you see her? Madame Reinhard is just speaking to her; who is she?"

Miss Manners seemed a little embarrassed:—"Oh! that—that is the Baroness d'Olban; French, of course. I never saw her before this evening; a friend asked leave to bring her. She is peculiar."

"You should be careful, Julia," said Lady Augusta, authoritatively; "report says she gambles."

"Ah! my dear, report!—but what am I to do, if I am to listen to report? I may as well shut up my house; and there is no doubt she is excessively intellectual, an authoress; she has published some splendid poems."

"She is an openly avowed infidel, I believe," said Mrs. Graham, gravely; and, without waiting for Miss Manners' reply, she told Isabella to remain with Lady Augusta, and went with Susan towards the circle, in the centre of which Helen had placed herself.

Madame Reinhard was concluding an eloquent speech upon the inherent rights of humanity, the danger of checking freedom of thought, the necessity of allowing every nation to develop its own powers, unshackled by forms and traditions. Even the thoughtful lecturer was listening to her with deference, whilst low murmurs of applause were heard from the admiring audience. Helen's eyes were riveted upon Madame Reinhard; as she ceased, she whispered "Go on, I could listen for ever." Madame Reinhard started, and blushed; her piercing gaze was softened by an appearance

of womanly feeling, and she drew back, saying that she was afraid she had been delivering very bold opinions. But Helen grew eager from the slight opposition; she repeated her praise of Madame Reinhard, and added observations of her own. Animation added to her beauty; and some of the gentlemen drew nearer, and listened attentively. Madame Reinhard, free from any petty rivalry, seemed anxious to bring her forward as her friend; and Helen, flattered and excited, and all unconscious of the lurking vanity, felt herself more and more at ease, and talked yet more freely.

"Elle est charmante, n'est-ce pas?" murmured the French Baroness to her nearest neighbour.

She was speaking to Claude. His reply was scarcely audible.

"What is her name? I am dying to know her. I must know her," continued the Baroness.

Claude started; the expression of his face became suddenly fierce. Susan was nearer to him than Helen; she was in the outer circle; her mother had left her for a moment. He made his way to her and addressed her in an under tone.

"Is this pleasant to you? would you rather go back to Mrs. Graham?"

Susan raised her eyes to his with a look of cordial, simple gratitude. "Thank you, but nobody notices me, and it amuses me to listen."

Claude glanced at Helen:—his words came with difficulty, but he said, "Your cousin is amused also, I imagine."

"She enjoys it," said Susan; "for the moment, that is."

A look of exceeding pain came over Claude's face, whilst he gave his attention to Helen again. She was talking French fluently with a strange gentleman. There was a little timidity in her manner, which gave a peculiar charm to the quick repartee in which she was indulging. Claude's eyes were fixed on her. Susan could scarcely endure the

expression of his countenance, it was so unlike himself; all tenderness was gone from it. She longed to stop Helen, yet could not move. It was a great relief when her mother's voice was heard behind her. "Susan, my love, will you come with me? supper is just ready." Claude looked round and smiled. But the next minute he was watching Helen as before. The Baroness d'Olban went up to Madame Reinhard. Claude could only have caught a few words, but he moved directly, placed himself between Helen and the Baroness, begged to be allowed to take Madame Reinhard into supper himself, and hastily, without any apology, introducing a staid, elderly gentleman to Helen, confided her to his care, and effectually prevented any introduction to the discomfited Baroness.

Madame Reinhard seated herself at the supper-table. Claude stood behind her chair. Helen and Susan were opposite. Madame Reinhard whispered to him, as he poured out a glass of wine for her: "They make a pretty contrast, one all quiet thought, the other all life and animation."

She imagined she had touched the right chord to excite him; but he only assented formally, and then, after a momentary silence, said: "May I ask if the Baroness d'Olban is your friend?"

Madame Reinhard turned so as almost to face him.

"Hush!" she said; "don't you see her?" The Baroness had just entered the room, talking very loudly; and Lady Augusta, seated by Miss Manners at the head of the table, glanced at her with an expression of concentrated disgust.

Claude was not to be repelled. "I trust you will pardon me; my question is not one of mere curiosity."

Madam Reinhard put aside her plate, and rose to make room for some one beside her. "We will go," she said, "the room is hot;" and Claude led her again into the drawing-room, and stood waiting the reply to his question.

Madame Reinhard's face showed amusement mingled with satire, as she said, "You are pertinacious."

"Very, I own it."

"And if I don't choose to answer your question?"

Claude bent his head rather haughtily, and replied that of course it was entirely at Madame Reinhard's option; he had hoped, however, that she would understand him better.

A laugh preceded the reply. "Ah! you men, you English, you do take offence so soon! Did I say I would not answer? Can I care? Madame la Baronne, what is she to me?"

"Nothing, I should hope," said Claude very gravely.

A little hesitation was evident in Madame Reinhard's manner.

"You are strict," she said. "What do you know about her?"

"Perhaps it may not be advisable to tell. It can never be wise to speak of one friend to another."

"But that is too bad!" exclaimed Madame Reinhard, angrily; "I did not say she was my friend. I do not know her; I do not care for her. I—she is *mauvais ton*; she is—Miss Manners is unwise; it is not well to have her here."

"Or to introduce her to young girls without the sanction of their parents," said Claude; and he looked at Madame Reinhard with an expression so quietly stern that for one instant she seemed to shrink from it.

Yet the feeling was shaken off almost as soon as felt; and with an air of offended dignity, Madame Reinhard replied: "I do not allow hints, Mr. Egerton, even from my friends. Forgive me, if I say that we know each other slightly, and it would be better to be open."

"Most willingly," said Claude. "You are Miss Clare's friend. I also"—his voice was husky, but he went on calm-

ly—"have known her many years. That must be my excuse for venturing to interfere. Perhaps I ought to have spoken to Lady Augusta."

Madame Reinhard interrupted him: "Speak to Miladi Augusta! But what about? Mr. Egerton, I will be angry; I will not bear this. Why speak to Miladi Augusta?"

"Merely to suggest to her that before any new acquaintance is made by her daughter, it would be well that Lady Augusta should decide whether it is likely to be a desirable one. The Baroness d'Olban can have no claim to be introduced to Miss Clare."

A gleam of sudden comprehension lighted up Madame Reinhard's face. "Ah! *ich verstehe*. But so foolish! *La pauvre Baronne!* You are jealous that she should become known to Miss Clare. *Ich verstehe!* And did you really think it would be?—it was not right, Mr. Egerton; it was not fair." Madame Reinhard spoke in a tone of just irritation.

"If I were mistaken," said Claude, in a softened voice, "you must pardon me. I certainly caught a few words which made me think that you were about to comply with some request."

"Some request! You men are so suspicious.—The Baroness would not venture.—She knows me so little, she would not dare to take the liberty.—We do not meet; we are not acquainted, except—very slight, very slight indeed." Madame Reinhard's eyes were raised to Claude's face fully, simply, so that he could not doubt her.

The change in his countenance and manner was very marked. "Then you are not her friend," he said, "and I may warn you against her. As a man I hear more than you are likely to do. I need not enter into particulars; but it is well known that she gambles frightfully, that her society is anything but select, that she is——"

"Un esprit fort?" said Madame Reinhard, with a peculiar accent of sarcasm upon the words.

"Yes, that, and much else, which it is most undesirable for a woman to be. How she came here to-night I can't imagine."

"Ah! Miss Manners! she does worship intellect," said Madame Reinhard; "and the Baroness is stupendous."

"So it is said. I have looked into her poems, and can only account for much which I found there by supposing a tendency to insanity."

"But you are not in earnest?" exclaimed Madame Reinhard. Then observing his grave expression, she added, almost as gravely, "But I have read very little."

"And you will not read more, I hope," said Claude, earnestly; "there is much in them likely to do immense mischief."

"Ah! yes, to some—the young. But I, an old married woman——;" and Madame Reinhard laughed, and added, "but you must not fear, and you must ask me to forgive, for you did me wrong."

Claude held out his hand, and said, "I do ask for forgiveness; but I think I have an excuse. I could not bear any person, any young lady with whom I might have even a slight acquaintance, to be brought in contact with such a person."

Madame Reinhard's smile was not quite satisfactory to Claude. She murmured to herself "*La pauvre Baronne!*" and then remarking that it was late, begged Claude to inquire if her carriage had been announced.

Lady Augusta returned home very much out of humour. Sir Henry took his candlestick and retired, with only one remark, that Mr. Randolph was a first-rate speaker, and would make a capital figure in the House. Helen was about to follow his example, but she was seized upon for a lecture.



"Wait a minute, my dear, I have something to say to you," and Helen sat down. "Your behaviour to-night has not pleased me. I don't choose to have such a show of independence. Madame Reinhard may be a very good woman, but I can't allow of your devoting yourself exclusively to her. Your cousin Susan was quite neglected. Captain Mordaunt was treated with actual incivility."

Helen answered hastily: "Mamma, you may criticise my conduct towards Susan as much as you please. She understands me too well to be offended. Towards Captain Mordaunt I must and will consult only my own feelings, my sense of what is true and dignified."

"There is little need to tell me, Helen, that you will follow your own will; that is shown by every look and action. Even your dress ——"

Helen grasped the arm of her chair tightly, and her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"Even your dress," continued Lady Augusta, "is nothing but an exaggeration and caricature. I suppose because I found fault, justly, with your uncalled-for magnificence, you chose to appear so entirely without ornament that Julia Manners even remarked it."

"It was late," replied Helen, in a tone of smothered resentment; "there was no time for ornament."

"A paltry excuse, Helen! unworthy of you! But it is all part of the same determination. You have but one object in life, to thwart me."

"May I be allowed to go to bed, mamma?" replied Helen. She stood up with her lighted candle in her hand.

Lady Augusta vouchsafed no reply, and Helen went to her room in towering indignation.

Bondage! the bondage of married life! it could be nothing to this. No vows, no promises, no duties could be so *galling* as this perpetual tutelage; and to last—how long?

For years and years—through youth and middle life, it might be; in all probability it would be. Surely Madame Reinhard was right. There was no freedom in England for an unmarried woman in her parents' house. Let her age and experience be what it might, those who had been accustomed to treat her as a child would still continue to do so, and the world would look upon her as such. Madame Reinhard was not so many years older, but she was free. She went where she liked, did as she liked, chose her own friends, her own society, read her own books, gave her intellect free scope. It was all the charm of that magic word, Madame. Under the shelter of subjection she was free; and Helen might be free also, more free even than Madame Reinhard, whose husband, it was whispered, was often ill-tempered and exacting. One word, and the simple, vapid, devoted Captain Mordaunt would lay at her feet his fortune, his expectations, his prospective title, all that could give her independence in the world, and ask only in return a nominal submission. In her grievous inconsistency, Helen allowed herself to meditate upon the possibility, until a remembrance of the past flashed across her mind, and the image of Claude Egerton, as she had that night seen him, rose up before her. All excitement was gone then—all hope, all feeling, but that heavy, overwhelming sense of shame. No, the freedom which she had pictured could never give her happiness.



## CHAPTER LII.

"TIRED, my child?" said Mrs. Graham, as Susan sat at work the next morning, looking pale, and almost out of spirits.

"A little, *mamma*; but I think my mind is more tired than my body. It always is after I have been at a party."

"There could not have been much to tire you last night," observed Anna, drawing near Susan and appearing quite relieved at the prospect of a little conversation. "You seem to me to have done nothing but sit still and listen to what one might just as well read in a review."

"Lectures are different from reviews, though," observed Isabella. "You would understand it, Anna, if you had been with us last night. I might have read precisely the same words in a book and they would have had no effect upon me."

"Words read come to one through the medium of one's mind, words spoken through that of the speaker. I suppose that makes the difference," replied Mrs. Graham. "But, Susan, the lecture did not tire you?"

"Oh, no, mamma! I could have listened for another hour. But thinking, and wondering, and looking at everybody—that is the fatigue in society. I am always trying to understand people, and I never can." That strange French Baroness, and Madame Reinhard, and Helen, and Mr. Egerton—they are all such mysteries."

"Madame Reinhard is fascinating," said Isabella. "I don't wonder at Helen's being so bewitched with her."

"Mamma looks grave," observed Anna; "she doesn't like Madame Reinhard."

"And Mr. Egerton does not," observed Susan.

"I admire her," replied Mrs. Graham.

"Oh, mamma! that is so cold!" exclaimed Isabella.

"You would not have me say I love her, my dear child, when I have not seen her above half-a-dozen times in my life."

"But she is so clever, so brilliant and original. She has real genius! Mamma, one must delight in genius!"

"Madame Reinhard's genius would disappoint me, I am sure," said Susan.

"Because you are so prosaic, Susan. You can't separate what people feel and think from what they do."

"It is rather difficult, I own," replied Susan, quietly. 'But, mamma,'—and she turned to her mother—"is genius, or talent, or intellect of any kind, to be admired for itself? That is what I have been thinking about all the morning."

"And all last night, too, I suspect," exclaimed Anna. 'What do you think, mamma, was Susan's observation when she woke me up from my comfortable sleep at one o'clock this morning? 'I am very glad I don't live with geniuses; I am sure I should be very wicked if I did.'"

"Possibly Susan had arrived at a right conclusion," replied Mrs. Graham, laughing; "though it was very unmerciful to trouble you with it at such an irrational hour."

"But, mamma, mamma!" exclaimed Isabella; "genius make one wicked? How can it? It is divine! it comes from God!"

"So you may say of personal beauty, which we are all apt to estimate wrongly," replied Mrs. Graham.

"But you cannot put that on a par with genius!" exclaimed Isabella.

"Certainly not; only as it is a gift of God it is worthy of admiration, and we do admire it. Anything which raises a man above his fellows, even physical force alone, will excite the feeling. If we could see a giant tear up a tree by its roots, we should admire him."

"Oh! yes, mamma! with a certain kind of admiration," replied Isabella, in a disappointed tone. "But who would care for that?"

"No one with any appreciation of that which is really admirable, my dear child. Yet I am saying, I think, what is true. The feelings seem to me to rest on the same basis, the sense of power, and only to differ in degree."

Even Anna was startled by this, and broke in suddenly with an expression of dissent.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Graham, quietly, "the highest

intellect and most consummate genius in the universe, putting aside—if one may venture so to say—the intellect of the Supreme Being, is that of Satan.”

There was a momentary silence, and some expression of pain on Isabella’s face; then she said in a low voice, “But we could never worship that.”

“I am not so sure, my love. I question, whether, if we could analyse our feelings, we should not all find that admiration, approaching to worship, is mixed up with our idea of Satan—not admiration of his wickedness, but of his intellect and power: the same feeling, in fact, which shows itself more plainly in the homage we pay to what we often call greatness in our fellow creatures; to Napoleon, for instance, or Alexander the Great; or perhaps to intellectual superiority only, as in Goethe, or Dante, or Shakspeare.”

“Goethe, and Dante, and Shakspeare! But, mamma, they were so different!” exclaimed Anna.

“Yet we—meaning by we, the people of this present age—are in the habit of placing them in the same category, my love. The question of moral worth does not weigh with us. They were great, therefore they were to be revered. Satan also is great, therefore he is to be revered. The feeling is perfectly natural; and we find that in heathen countries it does actually develope itself into devil worship—the worship of power apart from goodness.”

Isabella looked extremely shocked; and Anna remarked that it was a very perplexing subject, for in the Bible the ten talents obtained the highest reward, which, of course, showed that superiority of any kind must be an advantage.

“But then they gained ten talents more,” remarked Susan.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Graham; “as our Lord says, ‘To whom much is given, of him will be much required.’ And *the much*, Anna, must be not what the world estimates, but

what God estimates. We are expressly told that 'not many wise men after the flesh are called;' and that 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.' If these words mean anything they must mean that the talents which God will reward are not intellectual, but moral."

"But those who had the most given them were to obtain the highest glory," persisted Isabella.

"Certainly, dear child. But then we must all allow that great advantages involve great risks and temptations. Therefore, if the ten talents gained ten more, there must have been greater watchfulness and earnestness than in the case of the five talents, which gained five."

"But supposing the ten talents had only gained two or three?" said Susan, thoughtfully.

"Then surely, my love, they would have fallen far short of the purpose for which they were given, and so the person who possessed them would have been worthy rather of blame than reward. Remember, I am only carrying out our Lord's parable,—not supposing that we can really be anything but unprofitable servants at the best."

"I think I see," observed Isabella, a little unwillingly; "but it is very difficult exactly to measure what every one has done and what he might have done."

"Not only difficult, but impossible," observed Mrs. Graham. "Talents in the Bible, as we all know, mean every kind of advantage; and we can neither tell what talents others possess, nor what use they make of them really. But the tendency in the present day is to call a man's intellectual gifts his talents, and to reverence him according to the amount bestowed, and not according to the use made of them. There lies the danger."

"But I would not reverence the man, but only his gifts," said Isabella.

"*Very plausible, my love; but not very possible.* When

you think of a man, you must think of him as a whole ; you may analyse, and divide, and make metaphysical distinctions in abstract reasoning,—but the very oneness of our being, which constitutes our personal identity, compels us to feel towards each individual as *one*, to form one idea of him ; and if this idea be mingled with reverence, from whatever cause, we do reverence the man, and not his gifts. Think, for instance, of any person, past or present,—Napoleon, William the Conqueror, or any individual of your acquaintance. If it were not for this power of forming one conception of the individual, combining all you know of his powers, intellectual, physical, and moral, collecting, as it were, the essence from his being, you would really have no idea of him at all. He would be to you merely different phases of a living creature,—a succession of phantoms, as he may have appeared at different periods of his life. There must be something distinct and beyond all this ; and if you try to describe any person, you will feel that there is. You may say he is passionate, generous, clever, moody, fastidious, anything you like ; but you will feel all the time, that you are not really making the person to whom you are talking understand your idea of the man. It is this *idea*, or rather this reality,—for no doubt it is in its nature a reality,—which excites your feeling of whatever kind ; and if this should be reverence, you do, and must, reverence the man, the essential, individual, man ; and if he be not worthy of reverence, if his will be not in accordance with God's will, and his heart subject to God's law, then you are allowing yourself to honour that which is not honoured by God."

Isabella looked very grave, and said, that it was next to impossible not to admire talent of any kind, and still more genius.

"I don't object to your admiring it, my love," replied *Mrs. Graham* ; "admire it, if you will, as you do a beautiful

face, or a beautiful picture ; but don't let reverence be mixed up with admiration."

"Don't worship Madame Reinhard," said Anna, laughing.

"Mamma does not like us to be personal," replied Isabella, rather quickly.

"Unless there may be some good reason for it," observed Mrs. Graham. "I am very willing to give you my opinion of Madame Reinhard, and you can judge for yourselves, as you see more of her, whether I am right. I think she is brilliant, but rather superficial ; with a great many good qualities, which unfortunately want a foundation, and so are perhaps only the more likely to lead her astray."

"So very, very cold, mamma !" exclaimed Isabella.

"My love, I really can't be enthusiastic about any person, when I see that self-indulgence, instead of self-denial, is the rule of life."

"Does Madame Reinhard lie on sofas, and eat and drink a great deal ?" asked Anna, satirically.

Isabella gave an indignant negative.

Susan smiled, and said, that even according to Helen's account, Madame Reinhard was not indifferent to the comforts of life.

"And why should she be ?" inquired Isabella. "Mamma, you don't uphold asceticism."

"Because I believe that very often there is a great deal of self-conceit and spiritual pride concealed beneath it, my love. But I do most entirely uphold that self-restraint, which never allows enjoyments to get the mastery over us ; which can give them up when required, either by reason or religion. But really, Anna, as regards Madame Reinhard, I was thinking much more of intellectual than physical self-indulgence."

"Yes ; I suppose she is not likely to be tempted by wine and cigars," said Anna, laughing.



"But she would allow them to others," observed Susan, quickly. "*Vivre et laissez vivre*, is her motto."

"She is charitable," said Isabella.

"Because she requires charity herself," observed Anna. "Mamma, is not that true?"

Mrs. Graham only smiled.

"Mamma, now, you must answer," continued Anna.

"Well! if I must, I will say that I don't think it can be true charity which puts aside the laws of God. Therefore, if we have strict rules for ourselves, we must, I suppose, necessarily be somewhat strict with our neighbours. We may make excuses for them, but we must not call wrong right. And self-indulgence of any kind is unquestionably wrong."

Mrs. Graham moved, intending to go away, but Isabella detained her: "One more word, mamma. Intellectual self-indulgence! I don't understand what you mean by it."

"The enjoyment of intellect without regard to religion and morality," replied Mrs. Graham. "I have heard Madame Reinhard acknowledge that she reads books which no woman ought to read, merely because they are clever. I have heard her speak enthusiastically in praise of persons whose lives are openly scandalous, for the same reason; and I am afraid she courts their society. She confesses that she studies only for the purpose of pleasing herself, and that she can see no other use or object in study. Now all this, Anna, must be pernicious; it must lower a person's standard of right, and it is undoubtedly based upon selfishness. Of course I should not speak so freely of Madame Reinhard to any one else; but you must meet her occasionally, and you are very likely to be fascinated by her, as Helen is, and so I would rather put you on your guard beforehand."

"I think I would rather not have been put on my guard," said Isabella, when her mother left the room.

And Susan looked up from her work, and added: "I

heard Mr. Egerton say very much the same as mamma a few evenings since."

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### CHAPTER LIII.

"Ah! *mein liebes Herz*! alone, and thinking! may I know the thoughts?"

Helen had not seen Madame Reinhard for two days, and she looked up with pleasure at the sound of her voice; but there was still something sad in the expression of her countenance.

"My thoughts would be of no use to you," was her reply; "you would not understand them."

"But that is judging beforehand; and I may be wiser than you think. Suppose I could guess?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Helen, quickly.

"And wherefore? but perhaps you would not like them to be told?"

A faint tinge of colour was visible on the cheek; then it deepened and spread, and still the gaze continued; till Helen, unable to bear it, turned away, with tears gathering in her eyes.

"You are brooding over the past—sorrowing for it—*meine liebe*."

"I don't sorrow, I have nothing to sorrow for," exclaimed Helen, quickly.

"Nay, then I am ignorant. Have we not often and often told each other of the beautiful past?"

"It was not beautiful," said Helen. "When I possessed it I did not care for it; and I don't think about it now. If the present were different, I should not."

A shadow of annoyance was visible on Madame Rein-

hard's face. She answered rather satirically, "The present is what we all choose to make it. If we think of earthly things it becomes earthly. Will you choose that? will you be content to live the life of every day, like the quiet cousin we saw the other night, and her grim cavalier, Mr. Egerton?"

If Helen had chosen to look at Madame Reinhard, she would have seen a glance which, whilst it seemed to wander all round the room, took in every change in her face; but her eyes were bent in another direction as she replied, with cold self-restraint, "You are rapid in your conclusions."

"Rapid perhaps, but true; do they not suit? like twins? she is so very—what do you call it? amiable, respectable; and he is John Bull—yes, very decided John Bull."

"That was not your impression when you exclaimed '*Quel grand homme!*'" said Helen, forcing herself to speak coldly.

"You remember that, do you? yes, a first impression, and a true one. *Quel grand homme!* in the outward man; but in the spirit, oh! no, no."

"Mr. Egerton has the reputation of living up in the clouds," said Helen, in a perverse tone. "There are not many John Bulls to be found there."

"In the clouds? does he attain so high? I should never have thought it," said Madame Reinhard, ironically. "And yet, yes, I suppose in his highest elevation he may reach the clouds; but the blue sky, the pure æther, which allows the free gaze to pierce even to the infinite,—Helen, he never has soared there."

"Very few persons have," said Helen.

"Pardon me, *mon amie*. Has it not been said that we are all poets when we read a poem well? So they who understand, who sympathize with, the noble minds whose dwelling is in the depths of infinity, must themselves be of them."

"It is a flattering creed at any rate," said Helen, with an incredulous smile.

"And a true one: and necessary to be believed," continued Madame Reinhard. "Great minds feel themselves great, or they never would be great. And lesser minds must feel what they are and what may be, or they will never attain to their perfection. Look round the world, or rather listen to me, who have had greater opportunities of observation than you: there are hundreds now wasting themselves in inaction, doomed to ignoble obscurity, who might have shone amongst the bright ones of enduring ages, could they but have realised their own powers."

"Is this a lecture for me?" said Helen. "I am quite willing to hear what my own powers are."

"Nay, not when you speak in that tone. We will talk of something else,—your work pattern—Miladi Augusta's crochet."

"I have vexed you," said Helen, affectionately.

"You never vex me, *meine liebe*; it is the mist: I wait till it is past."

"But it is past,—it shall be," said Helen. "I will hear anything you have to say, and believe it—if I can," was added in a doubtful tone.

"I wish you only to believe in yourself," continued Madame Reinhard. "I would not have you lower yourself by admiring that which is beneath you. You speak of that Mr. Egerton as though he were great, but he is not. Shall I tell you what he is? I read it in the first moment that he talked with me. He is of those who feel, though they may not say, that women have no right to independence of mind."

"No! no!" exclaimed Helen, impatiently. Then checking herself, with the instinct of concealing her own feelings, she added, coldly, "Yet, in one respect, I can imagine that

you are right. Mr. Egerton would never endure his wife to hold opinions different from his own."

"And so he would be a tyrant. Ah! Helen, Helen, there are souls which unite as one—which are one, but it is the union of freedom, not of subjection. Your Mr. Egerton is a man of forms, and creeds, and rules: the woman who would be happy as his wife must be content to cut and narrow her own mind to fit his. And there may be such an one." Madame Reinhard paused.

And Helen said, in a voice which never faltered, "My cousin Susan, for instance."

"Perhaps so; I know but little, yet I can sometimes see. She has been brought up (that is what you English call it, is it not?)—brought up, taken by the hand, trained, led. She would close her eyes and follow blindfold, and think she saw. Ah! *meine liebe*! how many there are like her!"

"It may be a pity there are not many more," said Helen, in a constrained voice.

"You think so," replied Madame Reinhard. "Well, you may be right. Of course, if there are Mr. Egertons, there must be Miss Grahams to suit them. But"—she seized Helen's hand, and forced her to look towards her—"let them be what they will to each other, *mein Kind*, I would kneel in thankfulness that you will never consent to be a slave."

Helen made no reply.

Madame Reinhard bent forward and kissed her forehead, and whispered, "Freedom, Helen, freedom! the dearest gift which God can bestow."

Helen's answer was bitter:—"I ask, as I have asked you often before,—where am I to find it? at home?"

"And I answer, as I have answered often before,—in a home of your own."

"I have such a choice!" replied Helen, almost angrily.

"Captain Mordaunt, perhaps, would be your recommendation, by way of securing an intellectual companion."

"Ah! Monsieur le Capitaine! There are many worse persons in this naughty world than Monsieur le Capitaine."

"Certainly, I should run no risk of being rid of him either by hanging or transportation," said Helen.

"And he would be good—he would not interfere; he go his way, you go yours,—that would be his motto. I could do very well with Monsieur le Capitaine."

"But you don't mean—you can't,—you would not for the world have married him!" exclaimed Helen.

"He never asked me," was Madame Reinhard's reply.

"But love, congeniality!" exclaimed Helen. "I don't understand you,—I can't in the least comprehend!"

"How should you, *mon amie*? we talk of different things. You look for that which is to be found once, twice, possibly three times, in the history of a hundred years. I grant you to be very happy, very blessed, if you *do* find it; but if you *don't*,"—and Madame Reinhard shrugged her shoulders,—“what can you do but do without it?”

"And live and die an old maid," said Helen, with an accent of quiet despair.

"*Meine liebe*, pity forbid! why do you speak of it? No: union of heart, sympathy of soul, may perhaps be found in a husband, though I look round the world and see very few who have found it, and those always content with less far than you or I would ask. But it can never be that we are shut out from it, though it may not be met with in him. Give me but freedom of action, and I will seek till I meet with it somewhere. Is it not my own case, Helen?" and Madame Reinhard's face assumed an expression of sadness. "My home!—what is it to me? but my friends!—do I not live in them—live by them? are they not my happiness? There is no sorrow for me, *meine liebe*, whilst you and I can *thus meet and be one*."

Helen fondly pressed the hand that was extended to her, but answered somewhat ironically: "And you think Captain Mordaunt would interfere with us less than mamma?"

"I am sure of it. But I don't speak of him, *le pauvre homme*. I would not mean any one in particular. Though he would be kind, good-humoured, and he would have means,—he would place the world at your feet." Helen shrank from the suggestion. Madame Reinhard added, laughingly, "You think that nothing, *mon amie*; but remember money is freedom's key, and freedom gives us the power of entrance into the spiritual world."

"I can't bear it, I must not hear of it!" exclaimed Helen: she rose up suddenly, and passed her hand across her brow, longing, so it seemed, to clear away some weight which pressed upon it. "Gretchen," and she turned almost fiercely to her friend, "you tempt me."

"Tempt you, *meine liebe*! no," replied Madame Reinhard, in a sweet indifferent tone, as though the subject had scarcely rested for a moment in her mind. "Friends cannot tempt one another in these matters, they can but tell of their own experience. I said ~~but~~ what came into my head, brought there by the sight of Miladi Augusta's face when she met me in the passage. She will not let us long be together, *mein Kind*."

"Was she alone?" asked Helen, quickly.

"No, there was Monsieur le Capitaine, waiting, despairing to see you, I suppose."

"Not to see me! he is quite aware that I have nothing to say to him," exclaimed Helen.

Madame Reinhard made no direct reply, she only said: "Miladi Augusta looked thunder: I could almost have supposed she knew my wish. I would carry you off, *mon amie*."

"For a drive? I am engaged to go out with mamma."

"But you drive with her every day, and I would take you where you would like to go."

"And you really thought mamma would say yes?" asked Helen.

"I thought I would beg. Miladi Augusta cannot be so very hard, when she has you all day."

"Try," said Helen, bitterly.

"She cannot make you such a slave. Only a drive!"

"Try," repeated Helen.

To her surprise, Madame Reinhard rose from her seat, and said, playfully: "I go, and I return conqueror;" and she left the room.

Helen sat in the same position, dreaming sadly: a weight was upon her, a sense of entanglement oppressed her, but she did not feel that she had sufficient energy to shake it off. She was sure that Madame Reinhard had some meaning in her proposal, but she could not trouble herself to inquire what it might be. After a few moments the door opened, and Madame Reinhard appeared again, accompanied by Lady Augusta and Captain Mordaunt. The expression of her face was peculiar,—the mouth was grave, the eyes laughed. She left it to Lady Augusta to speak.

"Helen, Madame Reinhard tells me that you have a headache, and that a drive in her open carriage will be pleasanter than going out with me in a close one."

Helen was about to deny the headache, but Madame Reinhard interrupted her, just as she was beginning to answer. "We will have no excuses, *mon amie*. You are very pale, we think so, all; the drive will be very good, and Monsieur le Capitaine, he also goes for a ride in the park at this hour, and that will be our pleasant escort."

"Then you had better go at once," continued Lady Augusta; "I wish you to be at home in good time. We shall see you at dinner," she added, addressing Captain Mordaunt.

The unmeaning face, half-hidden by whiskers and a



moustache, was brightened by a smile, as Captain Mordaunt expressed himself proud to accept the invitation; and Helen, not being able to object to the arrangement without positive incivility, went to prepare for her drive.

By what means Madame Reinhard had contrived to gain that one victory, she did not choose to confess to Helen; but it was followed by several others, all of the same kind. One day it might be a visit to a picture gallery, another day to a panorama, or an exhibition of curiosities; the object seemed to be of little consequence to Lady Augusta, as long as Madame Reinhard and Helen were not closeted together, but allowed Captain Mordaunt to attend upon them. Yet she never mentioned his name to Helen in private, neither did Madame Reinhard. His coming or going appeared to be a matter of equal indifference to both, whilst Helen treated him with a coldness, which she believed was a sufficient indication of her sentiments to prevent his being deceived. Only now and then Madame Reinhard, by some seemingly accidental observation, drew Helen's attention to the fact, that she was more free with Captain Mordaunt than without him. He was undoubtedly very good-natured, and had not mind enough to interfere with the mind of others; and Helen and her friend were able to carry on in his presence conversation which would have been *tabooed* by Lady Augusta as dangerously liberal. Being certain that she did not care for him, and that he was aware of the fact, Helen by degrees was becoming accustomed to him. The "cousinship," and the long acquaintance were an excuse for a certain amount of convenient familiarity, cleverly fostered by Madame Reinhard, who took every opportunity of making him useful.

Helen was very blind to what was going on. Her thoughts were often preoccupied, and the very knowledge that Lady Augusta wished her to encourage Captain Mordaunt, made it appear impossible that Madame Reinhard, even

if she were capable of manœuvring, could have the same object in view.

But, for once, the clever, liberal, sophistical Madame Reinhard, and the stern, prejudiced, but equally worldly-minded Lady Augusta Clare, were agreed.

Madame Reinhard's position in the society to which she had been admitted, was a doubtful one. She had entered it, as it were, by stealth, introduced by Miss Manners, and a few other would-be literary people, who were fascinated by her quickness of intellect, and amused by the freedom and originality of her foreign manners and habits of thought. But she stood by herself; her husband's tastes were different from her own; his friends were regarded with suspicion; and he had neither rank nor fortune sufficient to set the opinion of the world at defiance. Many persons declined an intimacy with Madame Reinhard, because they did not choose to become acquainted with her husband; others, like Lady Augusta, admitted her to their society for a time, and then were inclined to draw back. She could only be certain of those who were exclusively devoted to the worship of talent, and were content to set aside every prejudice, or even principle, for the sake of its enjoyment. And this did not satisfy her. Professing the most exalted theories of unworldliness and contempt for conventionalisms, Madame Reinhard was, in truth, the slave of admiration and the devotee of fashion. To be first, wherever she might be, was an absolute essential to her happiness. To be excluded from any society was a sufficient motive to induce her to force her way into it at all hazards. Intercourse with literary people sufficed as long as it was but a stepping-stone to something beyond; but when once she had discovered that there was an inner circle, into which she had not the power of entrance, her vain and restless spirit wearied itself in endeavours to break through *the magic barrier*.

And Helen might assist her—Helen, with beauty, grace, talent, and fortune,—as the wife of a man who must, before very long, inherit an earldom, would have it in her power, and certainly in her will, to give Madame Reinhard, or any person whom she chose to acknowledge as her friend, admission to the society in which she herself was privileged to move. For Madame Reinhard never distrusted Helen. There is something in truth of character which even the untrue cannot but feel. Helen might be raised to a throne, and Madame Reinhard knew that it would make no difference in her affection. If they were friends now, when Helen was a young girl, kept under subjection in her father's house, still more would they be friends, when Helen should have rank and wealth, and freedom, and be able to share them with whomsoever she would. Her house would be Madame Reinhard's house; her friends Madame Reinhard's friends; and her husband—that was but a secondary consideration; yet much better, surely, was it for Madame Reinhard's views, that he should be a puppet in her hands, than a man of strong, independent character, bent upon subjecting his wife to his will.

Better Captain Mordaunt than Claude Egerton. That was a danger which Madame Reinhard's penetration had discovered at one glance. Past it might be—there was something in Helen's manner, reserved though she had been, which made it probable—but not so past as that its influence was gone. And Madame Reinhard smiled in scorn, as she dwelt upon the obstacles which had arisen in her path, and in her secret heart vowed that Helen Clare should, before another month was over, consent to be the future Countess of Harford.

CHAPTER LIV.

"WELL, Claude, my good fellow! glad to see you!" was the Admiral's greeting, as Claude sat down by the gouty chair, and began to inquire after his health. The Admiral's weather-beaten face was looking pale and deeply wrinkled that morning; his eyes had lost their brightness, and the tone of his voice was hollow, though its accent was cheerful. He did not seem inclined, as usual, to dilate upon his many maladies; rather he turned with an interest, which had somewhat of anxiety mingled with it, to Claude's account of his own doings. "And so you have been down at Helmsley for a day or two, seeing after your people? how did you make your business with the House suit with that?"

"I managed to pair off," was Claude's reply. "There was nothing very important coming on, and I wanted to get away very much," he added, in a lower tone.

"Hard work for you, my boy; late hours! they don't suit, I'm afraid. You must n't wear yourself out before your time."

"No great matter, dear sir, if I do. There won't be too many tears shed for me."

"Nonsense, Claude!" and the Admiral roused himself to energy. "I won't have any such folly. No tears shed for you! Why, if a man feels that he is worth enough to make him shed tears for himself, there is reason sufficient to prevent his throwing away his life. I shall think you are but a woman, after all, with such nonsense."

"But you must allow," said Claude, "that the consideration will have some influence. One can imagine fathers and mothers, for instance, only wishing for life, because of the loss *their death will be to their children.*"

"Well, then, marry, and be a father yourself, and then you will have something to live for."

Every muscle in Claude's face was rigidly strained, whilst the Admiral's eye was fixed upon him. Very slowly, but with perfect calmness, he answered: "I have no wish to marry at present."

The Admiral's first movement showed irritation; the next instant he laid his rough hand upon Claude's, and said, "My poor boy!" and tears stood in his failing eyes. After a momentary pause, he added, impatiently, "You should n't be in London to come across that girl."

It required a great, great effort to speak, but Claude made it. He said firmly, "I feel that it is best we should meet, sir, and I am very thankful that we have done so. It will be much less painful the second time."

"To you, perhaps; as for her, she does n't care enough to feel more or less pain."

"I cannot flatter myself she does," replied Claude; "and in a certain way that fact makes my task more easy."

"What task? you have done with her? you have had enough of her?" exclaimed the Admiral.

Claude's answer was a faint attempt at a smile.

The Admiral became suddenly grave. "I'll tell you what, Claude, my boy," he said; "there's no cure for all this but marriage—marriage for you and marriage for her; and take my word for it, she'll be the first to set you the example. Even now, I know from very good authority, that she's on the high road to it; and when she has thrown herself away upon that jackanape cousin of hers, for the sake of being one day a countess, then I suppose there'll be some chance of your friends seeing you a happy, domestic man."

"Miss Clare is engaged then to Captain Mordaunt?" began Claude, coldly.

"Miss Clare! don't talk of Miss Clare to me!" inter-

rupted the Admiral; "Helen is the only name I know her by now; fair and false as her namesake. As to her being engaged or not, I won't venture to say; you know well enough, engagements are not matters of much consequence to her. But any how, she's flirting with him till she's the talk of London. You see, Claude, though I do sit in my gouty chair, with my back to the light, I can tell how the world goes. What's the matter? what are you after?" he added, as Claude rose up and stood fronting the fire-place.

Claude turned round directly. "Very likely the report is true, sir. In a worldly point of view it will be a very good connection."

"And you won't fret your life out about it?"

"I wish she may be happy, sir: you will allow me that wish."

"And I wish you may be happy, my dear boy. There, come and sit down by me: don't mind; though you may be a man to others, you are a boy to me—*my* boy, and its natural enough for me to think as I do. Time goes on, and health and strength go with it, and before long I sh'a'nt be able to say what I would. God knows, Claude, how fathers love their children. 'T was His will to shut up that joy from me; yet He has given me a taste of it too. There are few fathers who would do more for their sons than I would for you; and when I think of lying down in my grave, the weight which lies heaviest on my heart is the thought that you may go through life as I have gone through it myself."

Claude looked surprised, but before he could speak the Admiral continued: "I know what you would say. I've been a fortunate man, a prosperous, an honoured man. No one, to the best of my belief, will say an ill word of me after my death, and many have said good words of me during my life. God be thanked for both. But, Claude, I haven't been a happy man. *There's been a want.* Look!" and he

drew forth a small locket attached to a hair chain ;—" would you think now that an old fellow, verging towards eighty, would be such a fool ? that he would care still for that which is now only a remembrance of one who is an angel in Paradise ; and who did n't love him—Claude, did n't love him," he repeated, with an accent of mournful bitterness. " Ah ! we are all more weak than we choose to own ; and seventy years of this world's storms have n't sufficed to make me look upon that trinket as what it is ; a bit of childish memory ; a love-token from a little one who did n't know what love meant. How other men manage I can't say, it's seen a problem many a time ; perchance, they don't feel as I felt ; but one thing I have learnt, Claude, from my own experience, and it's the legacy of advice I'd fain give to you. Don't cherish your sorrow : when God breaks our idols in pieces, it is n't for us to put the broken bits together again. I did it. For years I nursed my grief, and would n't part from it, and when I would fain have rid myself of it, it was too late. I had grown suspicious, and felt myself disagreeable, and thought that no woman could ever be brought to care for me, and so I never could bring myself to ask her if she would try ; and then I became what I am now ; an old bachelor, a weariness and a trouble."

Claude interrupted him : " Never, sir, never ; think of Mrs. Graham, of her children ; think of me. Is there anything a son would do for a father which I would not do for you ? "

The old man laid his hand upon Claude's head : " God bless you, my boy, for being a blessing to me. Yes, He has been very merciful ; but it is written,—many and many a time have the words come to me almost as a reproach,—' It is not good for man to be alone.' And it is true, Claude : women are not alone like men, when they have reached old age without being married. Their hearts are softer, they

form more ties; they have more loving ways. All their lives through, for the most part, they have lived in families, and so the families cling to them, and become theirs. But men are very solitary, Claude; for the greater part of their life society shuts them in as by walls: they have no choice; their friends must be men; and one man may have a great regard for another, they may be very dear friends, but there's seldom anything softening, there's not enough tenderness in the love; and a man wants that even for his good. The nature is hard, and the world makes it harder, and if there's no woman's influence to melt it, ten to one but he lives for himself, and his selfish needs, and so the good that is in him never puts itself forth. I should have been a better man, Claude, if I had married: married, that is, well and wisely."

"Yes, if one could marry well and wisely," exclaimed Claude, hastily.

"To be sure; that's the point. Better go down to your grave lonely, than with a trouble which will eat into your vitals; and there's none will do that sooner than a senseless wife. But the fault is, Claude, in thinking that because you can't have the first thing you wish for, you won't do very well with the second."

"The loss of the first may destroy all inclination for the second," said Claude.

"A burnt child dreads the fire, eh? But you don't mean to tell me that there are n't fifty,—a hundred women, better worth having in the world than that butterfly girl, Helen Clare?"

"I have no doubt of it, sir; not the least, as far as the taste of other men is concerned, or even according to my own judgment."

"But you don't choose to seek them out," said the Admiral, in a disappointed tone.

"Once deceived, deceived for ever," said Claude, sternly.



A gleam of quick intelligence brightened the Admiral's eyes. "Ah! my boy! I understand. That's the harm. It's what we all do to each other, more or less. No one of us can fall from a pinnacle without shaking those who stand on the pinnacles round us. But perchance, Claude, there may be some placed on pinnacles who had no right to be there; and the fault then may be with those who put them there."

"Very likely, sir, very likely," said Claude, in a tone of impatience, which showed how distasteful the subject was to him. But the Admiral would not let him escape.

"You must bear with me, my dear boy; you must let me say my say. There may n't be so many opportunities left; and I have it at heart, Claude. It's a yearning I have to see you married."

"Indeed!" said Claude, incredulously.

"Yes, you may n't think it; but if it had been that you had married Helen Clare, I believe I should have been better pleased than to see you as you are. You are n't made for the life."

"I shall become used to it, no doubt," said Claude.

"Use! It's nature, not use, that makes a man fit to be an old bachelor. There are men made for it, with large hearts but cold temperaments; who love widely, but not deeply; who have their work put before them when they enter life, and who can throw themselves into it, and make it their object. We must all marry something, Claude, or we could n't live: and some marry principles, and some duties, and some fame, and not a few marry themselves. But it's not in you, by nature, to do either; and if you don't find a wife to your taste, and that before long, the want will canker and eat out all the soft parts of your nature."

"That has not been your case, sir," said Claude.

Perhaps not entirely. But yours would be worse than

mine. We are not alike. You are shut up. I open to everybody, and so everybody opens to me. If you don't take care, Claude, you'll begin by acting coldness, and you'll end by feeling it. That's a danger which young people don't think of; but it's a true one."

Claude was silent and thoughtful: then, as with a sudden recollection of duty, he turned to the Admiral, and said, "You are right, sir, I know. If I can't talk about it, I feel it."

"Act, man, act! I would n't give a farthing for feeling without action."

Claude smiled faintly.

The Admiral leaned back in his chair, looking very tired. He sighed; and Claude stood up to go, and yet lingered.

"Shall I ask Mrs. Graham to come to you, sir?" he said.

"She's out," was the Admiral's short reply. "Pour out my medicine, Claude; it's time I should take it."

"Is Miss Graham at home?" inquired Claude, as he put the glass into the Admiral's hand.

The glass was rested upon the table, and the old man's eye sparkled. "You'll find her in the drawing-room, she had been reading to me before you came; the other girls went with their mother."

"I shall only disturb her, I am afraid," said Claude, coldly.

The Admiral drank off his nauseous draught, and answered quickly, "Not a bit, man. Faugh! where are the biscuits? one would think it was ink. Not a bit likely to disturb her, if you've anything to say."

"Only a question to ask," said Claude, doubtfully.

"She'll answer it: she's always ready. Ring the bell for Barnes; he must rub my foot."

Barnes came. "*Miss Graham in the drawing-room, Barnes?*"

"I believe so, sir."

"Right; I told you so." The Admiral addressed Claude. "She'll come here, if you like it best."

"Oh, no, no! thank you! I would not on any account give her the trouble. I merely wanted to ask for the address of a German lady she knows slightly."

"She'll give it you. She's sure to do it. Better go and ask her." And Claude assented, though rather as if he were speaking in a dream. And the Admiral, in spite of his weariness, smiled, as he leaned back in his chair and muttered to himself, "I will do it, after all."

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## CHAPTER LV.

"AFFAIRS seem making progress, my dear friend," said Miss Manners, as she entered Lady Augusta's boudoir; having just seen Helen set off for her ride in the park with her father and, as a necessary attendant, Captain Mordaunt.

Lady Augusta continued to work at her carpet with an air of severe industry. "I leave all these things, Julia, my love. Helen will take her own way. I don't think of them."

"But your heart must be deeply interested in them," continued Miss Manners. "It is impossible to watch the course of a devoted attachment without being so."

"My heart, I am thankful to say, is not deeply interested in any worldly events, Julia," replied Lady Augusta. "Look at this lily, my love. Do you think the shades are exact? I have been examining them for the last ten minutes minutely, and can't yet make up my mind. It would be sadly disappointing to find they are wrong; and I have no time left to

alter; the work must be finished by the eighteenth, or it won't be ready for the consecration."

Miss Manners brought her near-sighted eyes close to the delicate work, looked at it in every direction, and decided that she could not tell. She thought it possible there was a difference, but she was not sure; she hoped not, but then she was afraid; in fact, she was no judge.

Lady Augusta rang the bell. "Excuse me, Julia, but I must have the point determined, everything depends on it." And seating herself at her writing desk, she wrote a note to be taken with the work to the Berlin warehouse, where the experienced sorter and arranger of wools was to decide the question. Then she turned to Miss Manners with a relieved countenance.

"You will forgive me, my love; you don't enter into these things;" and a sigh followed the words. "But you were speaking of Helen! did you meet her?"

"Looking lovely," replied Miss Manners; "and with spirits so brilliant, so exuberant; certainly there is nothing like the first freshness of youthful animation."

"No," replied Lady Augusta, solemnly; "it is, indeed, a great snare. I find Helen becoming more and more worldly, Julia. She refuses to go with me to the consecration next week, and I shall be obliged to have recourse, as usual, to her father's authority. I should have thought that, after the example I have set, the advice I have given, her eyes would have been opened, but she is wilfully blind."

"The sympathies of married life will probably do much for her," replied Miss Manners; "I have seen many girls change in a wonderful way, when they have found a heart to respond to their own. Lady Louisa Stuart and I have been discoursing upon this subject for nearly an hour this morning. Of course you know her happiness?"

"Louisa Stuart! happiness!" exclaimed Lady Augusta,

quite forgetting in excitement her measured solemnity of manner: "you don't mean to say, Julia, that she is going to be married; why, she is nearly fifty."

"She has found a heart to beat in unison with her own," replied Miss Manners. "True,—it has known less of the world's troubles by twenty years; but what is time when feelings are young? Lady Louisa was sweetly confidential with me on the occasion, and talked much of you and of dear Helen, regretting that she had formerly thrown away a chance of happiness, and wishing that she could share her joy."

Lady Augusta's foot patted the floor, as in a very gruff tone she inquired who the man was.

"He is foreign, my love,—Polish,—a Polish count,—an exile—most intellectual,—beautifully refined,—sensitive,—so Lady Louisa tells me,—to the most extreme degree. I believe she met him at a *soirée* given by Madame Reinhard."

Lady Augusta nearly started from her seat. "Madame Reinhard! that woman is at the bottom of half the mischief in England. It is an absurdity, Julia. A Polish exile! Louisa Stuart throw herself away upon a refugee! It is monstrous; not to be believed."

"Nay, my dear friend; quite true," replied Miss Manners, drawing herself up with dignity; "and, however you may think fit to condemn Madame Reinhard, you must acknowledge that her society is sought by the most enlarged and cultivated minds in London."

"I care not a whit for their cultivation," exclaimed Lady Augusta. "You frighten me, Julia; you have lost all common sense. This German woman has bewitched you. Louisa! my cousin! my first cousin! so very intimate as we have been! She will be the laughing-stock of London. I can't imagine, Julia, why you don't see the excessive impropriety of the whole thing."

"Lady Louisa judges for herself, my dear," said Miss Manners.

"And Helen will some day, I suppose, judge for herself," continued Lady Augusta, "adopting as she does Madame Reinhard's tone; we shall have her following the example, and uniting herself to a Polish infant in long clothes. But it must be ended; I won't bear it. Helen shall not keep me any longer in such torturing suspense."

"I don't understand, my dear," began Miss Manners; "it is difficult to understand the connection of ideas."

"Of course not, of course not," exclaimed Lady Augusta. "Forgive me, my love. I am chafed, fretted." She took out her watch. "Four o'clock! I have shopping to do; but I shall leave it. I shall go into the park, then to church. I require soothing. These worldly anxieties are too much for me."

The bell was rung again. "Order the carriage directly. If Captain Mordaunt calls, tell him we expect him at dinner. And John"—as the servant was about to leave the room, he was recalled,—“when my parcel is brought back from the Berlin warehouse, let me have it immediately, without delay. I must ease my mind at least upon that point,” murmured Lady Augusta to herself, as she stood before the window in a moody reverie.

An observation made in a very reproachful tone disturbed her: "Really, Augusta, you perplex me very much; these sudden storms of feeling are what I am not prepared for."

Lady Augusta turned round slowly; her excitement was quite gone. "My dear Julia," she said, "it is impossible that you should be; we live in different atmospheres; we breathe a different air. When you have known the responsibility of a mother's charge you will comprehend, not till then. But don't be alarmed. I shall not allow myself to be overcome; the emotion is but temporary. I doubt not that I shall, ere long, see my dear Helen's best interests provided for, and be *at liberty to seek repose*. Till then, my love,

think of me, and pray for me." Lady Augusta pressed her friend's hand tenderly, and left her, saying, "You will come to us, this evening, Julia;" an invitation which was declined with all due protestations of lasting affection and sympathy.

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## CHAPTER LVI.

LADY AUGUSTA changed her intention before she reached the Park. The order was given to drive to Cavendish Square; she wished to call on Mrs. Graham and Admiral Clare,—the last wish that was likely to arise in Lady Augusta's mind, except from some feeling of necessity.

"Is your master able to see me, Barnes?" was her softly-uttered inquiry, as Barnes made his appearance in the hall.

"I will inquire my lady." Barnes knew his duty too well to admit Lady Augusta without preparation. Mrs. Graham was out. Miss Graham at home. Lady Augusta was shown into the drawing-room; Susan sat there alone; work was in her hand, but her fingers were not moving. A man's glove lay on the table; her eyes were fixed on it so intensely, and her thoughts were so deeply engaged, that she did not perceive Lady Augusta's entrance.

A kiss on her forehead was almost the first intimation she received of the presence of her visitor. "My love, it is an age since we met. How are you? You are looking charmingly well." Susan happened to be very pale that afternoon, but lady Augusta knew her speech by heart, and would not be put out by facts.

"How is Helen?" asked Susan. It was the question *which from childhood she had invariably asked after one of*

Lady Augusta's salutations. It seemed the shortest way of putting an end to them.

"Helen is tolerable, my love; she is gone out riding with her father and Captain Morduant. She rides nearly every day now. I wish you had a horse and could ride with her; it would be such a delight."

"Helen said something about it one day," replied Susan; "and the Admiral was very kind, and told her he would hire a horse for me, if I liked; but I am rather afraid of riding horses I don't know, in London; and there are so many other things to be done."

"Yes; so much to see for those who come to London but seldom! Your dear mamma I am afraid is not at home?"

"She went out with Isabella and Anna," replied Susan.

"They were to go to the Polytechnic, I think; Anna had never seen it."

"And they left you alone. Too bad that seems, but you have such resources. I often wish I could give Helen your habits of industry."

"She does not need them in the same way," replied Susan. "She has so many engagements."

"Ah! my dear, so you may think; but engagements abroad don't make up for want of interest at home, and Helen is sadly wanting in interest; she has been so ever since—that was a very unfortunate business of poor Claude's."

Susan could scarcely conceal her surprise. This was the first time that Lady Augusta had ever approached the subject.

"But I hope she may be getting over it," continued Lady Augusta. "At her age it is not possible that the morbid feelings in which she indulged at first should last; and so I trust, my love, we may yet see her happy. Her cousin, Captain Mordaunt, is devotedly attached to her."



"And is Helen going to marry him?" inquired Susan, hastily.

"My dear, you ask me a question of which I know as little as yourself. Helen is a mystery to me. She shuts herself up from me. She has but one friend now, a German lady; I think you have seen her—Madame Reinhard."

"Yes, I know Helen is very fond of her," said Susan.

"Quite spell-bound, my love. I have no power to withstand it. And it pains me—you can well imagine—after the very careful education which I gave to my dear child, that she should fix her affections upon a stranger, a foreigner; it has been a great grief to me, Susan."

"Helen once told me that Madame Reinhard was such a relief in the solitude of the country, that she could not help being fond of her," replied Susan.

Lady Augusta's countenance was clouded. "Helen had no right to say that, my dear. If I have kept her from ordinary country society, it has been in order to elevate and refine her taste, not to lower it. But let that be as it may, Helen is fast getting beyond my influence: but I have great confidence in you, Susan."

Susan was silent; she did not comprehend.

"Yes," continued Lady Augusta; "I feel that it is in your power to do much for my poor, wilful child; and it has been a subject of great regret that from circumstances she has been thrown so little with you. Since dear Claude's alienation, Helen has had no true friend. Ah! he would have guided her so well, Susan."

Lady Augusta's tone had a reality in it which for once quite deceived Susan, and she answered with hearty sympathy, that they had all felt very sorry for him and for every one.

"I feel assured of it, my love. I can at all times depend upon your entering into my feelings, and I think now I may *look to you for aid.*"

Susan's countenance spoke her surprise very plainly.

"I see, my love, that you don't understand me," continued Lady Augusta: "but I am sure you will allow me to be confidential with you. This friendship of Helen's troubles me. I don't know how to put a stop to it. Sir Henry is so indulgent, he won't interfere. A step-mother's position is a very difficult one, Susan; it is always looked upon with suspicion, and Helen is naturally inclined to rebel against authority. What I want is a friend who will enter into my views, who will be a friend to Helen also: am I mistaken, dear child, in thinking that I may look to you?"

Susan murmured something about her mother, it was the only way which presented itself of escaping what her instinct told her was likely to be a very disagreeable proposition.

"Ah! but, my love, that won't quite do. It is a friend of her own age that Helen requires—an influence which she will not suspect. Surely, Susan, you would help?"

"I can't see what I am to do," was Susan's blunt reply.

"Tact, my dear; that is the great desideratum, and I am sure you possess it"

"I am afraid not," said Susan. "I speak my mind too plainly."

"That simple sincerity! Helen will value it above all things. It will be a counterpoise to Madame Reinhard's influence. You could not come and stay with us, Susan?"

"Thank you, no; impossible!" exclaimed Susan, who could not help remembering that she had been in London for several weeks, and had received from Lady Augusta only the bare civilities of distant acquaintance, until now there was a motive for a show of affection.

"Why impossible, my love? Surely your dear mother will spare you, and Anna and Isabella are so good and useful."

"The Admiral won't like it," said Susan.

"Poor, dear old man ! I suppose not ; but he must be humoured ; we must come round him. I can't accept a refusal."

Susan's eye wandered round the room to escape Lady Augusta's gaze, which was so determined it almost compelled her to say yes.

In her confusion she moved a book near her, and Claude's glove fell to the ground ; she stooped to pick it up. Lady Augusta glanced at it inquiringly, as it was laid upon the table, but she made no remark, only repeated and insisted upon her request.

Susan felt a little more inclined to yield. It seemed impossible that she could do harm, and she might do good ; and she felt very uneasy about Helen. It did not appear right to allow her dislike to Lady Augusta to stand in the way. In a more cordial tone she replied, that she would talk to her mother, and send Lady Augusta a written answer ; she felt much obliged for the invitation ; with a few more civil speeches of the same kind, which were interrupted by a perfect hailstorm of thanks from Lady Augusta, who immediately began to enter more fully into what she called her views.

Susan heard them with an uncomfortable feeling. She was requested to be as much as possible with Helen and Madame Reinhard, to take care that Helen formed no new acquaintances amongst Madame Reinhard's friends ; in fact, to counteract indirectly the German influence which, for some reason that Lady Augusta evidently did not choose to confess, was still allowed the opportunity of working upon Helen's mind. Susan detested anything approaching to management and plan. She was again upon the point of declining the invitation at once, but Lady Augusta did not give her the opportunity. Of course, she said, Susan could not decide without consulting her mother ; but a refusal was

not to be heard of. It would be the greatest possible comfort to know that a third person, and such a person, was present when Madame Reinhard and Helen were together.

"But must they be together?" asked Susan, feeling more and more, that if she was helping Lady Augusta out of a difficulty, she might be helping herself into one.

"My love, there are reasons—you would scarcely believe it, but Helen has few persons to take an interest in her. We have many friends, but they all have their engagements—the London world is sadly selfish. And you know, Helen and I are very different, our tastes lie quite in an opposite direction. It would be impossible for me to follow her to all the frivolities on which her heart is set. And Madame Reinhard makes herself useful, so that I don't venture to interfere. Helen, indeed, seems to take pleasure in forming engagements which interfere with my one hour of rest in church; very different from you, my love."

"We generally go to the morning service," said Susan; "that interferes with no one."

"Ah! if health would permit! But late hours, late breakfasts: what is to be done? But I must not stay and talk, my dear, though I could willingly. Can I see the old Admiral for a few minutes?"

Lady Augusta was shown into the library. The Admiral tried to look his best. He detested condolences, but they formed a necessary part of Lady Augusta's formulas. He contrived, however, to cut them short.

"Your ladyship gives yourself too much trouble in asking so many questions. I am as well as pleases God; not quite so well as pleases myself. I should be back in the country if it weren't for Frances Graham, or rather her children."

"You are good to them, my dear sir."

"Not at all good. They put themselves out of their

way to come to London when I wanted to see my doctor, and it's only fair that I should put myself out of mine when they want to see all there is to be seen."

"But it must be a great enjoyment to them. Dear Susan, however, seems less energetic than the rest; I found her sitting thoughtfully alone in the drawing-room."

"Susan stayed at home because she had a cold. She has n't been alone very long; Claude Egerton was there talking to her not half an hour ago." The Admiral felt something like a naughty child in saying this: he hoped to tease Lady Augusta, and was quite aware that he should not have done it if Mrs. Graham had been present.

But Lady Augusta was imperturbable. She did not even betray that her curiosity was satisfied in having discovered the owner of the glove.

"Poor Claude! He is a frequent visitor here, I suppose," she replied. "I was glad to hear a friend say, the other day, that his spirits were rallying."

The Admiral laughed bitterly. "Your ladyship thinks with Shakspeare, 'Men have died, and worms have eaten them; but not for love.' I believe you are right. Claude Egerton is too sensible a man for that. I suppose we are to congratulate Miss Helen upon being prospective Countess of Harford."

"My dear Admiral, that is looking very far forward. No; I don't allow my mind to dwell upon such remote probabilities—possibilities perhaps I ought to call them: I wish to dwell only in the present. Life is so very uncertain; and one may never live to see what now seems close at hand. I shall feel for poor Claude if ever the time should come."

"Feel for him!" thundered the Admiral. "He doesn't want any one to feel for him. I beg your ladyship's pardon, but Claude Egerton can never be in want of a wife when he chooses to ask for one."

"I quite understand, my dear Admiral, quite sympathise with you : yes, indeed, dear Claude is a very noble fellow ! I only feel sorry that he should have fixed his affections so unfortunately, and been so *exigeant*. He pressed the thing—no woman can bear that ; but then Claude was never accustomed to women."

"Not to such women !" murmured the Admiral to himself. He said aloud, rather sulkily, "I suppose Sir Henry is too busy to come and see an old uncle ?"

"He is very busy, at the House every night ; but he would certainly find time for you, if he thought you had the slightest feeling upon the matter."

"I don't say I have," muttered the Admiral ; then vexed with himself, he added with childlike candour, "I should n't care to see him if he came only for duty."

"But he will be delighted, he will be rejoiced to talk over public matters with you, and he will tell you about dear Claude's success. We naturally take a deep interest in his career. I have heard many most eminent opinions about him ; all agree he is likely to be one of the most distinguished men of his day."

"Humbug !" was the word which came most readily to the Admiral's lips ; yet he could not help inquiring a little more minutely into the eminent opinions ; and Lady Augusta repeated, and enlarged upon them, and detailed a few anecdotes, and touched upon public topics so as to give the Admiral just the opportunity of contradicting her, which he enjoyed. He really thought at last that he had so put her down, that he could afford to be generous and civil, and then Lady Augusta seized her moment, and brought forward the subject which had been upon her mind from the beginning—Susan's visit.

The Admiral grumbled,—would give no opinion,—thought Susan would be much better at home,—did not know what

her mother would say,—but he was by no means decidedly antagonistic; and Lady Augusta, having learnt from long experience to “let well alone,” took care not to thank him too much, but hurried to her carriage, and drove to church, to exhibit herself in her favourite character of unworldliness, and to congratulate herself that her friends would no longer find fault with her for allowing Helen to associate exclusively with Madame Reinhard.

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## CHAPTER LVII.

‘SUSAN, are you dressed for dinner already?’ said Helen, coming into her cousin’s room at Grosvenor Place.

“I had something to read which I wished particularly to finish,” said Susan; “so I dressed first, that I might not be hurried.”

“And you are not in a humour to talk then? Yet I have seen nothing of you yet.”

“Is Madame Reinhard gone?” asked Susan.

“Yes, for the present”—and Helen sighed, and sat down in the easy chair, determined not to be sent away.

“You have had a long conversation with her,” said Susan; “you began before Lady Augusta and I went to Church.”

Helen looked up quickly. “So odd that is in you, Susan, to go to church with mamma! and you are not in the least a humbug—Madame Reinhard says so.”

“I am much obliged to her for her good opinion,” replied Susan, rather haughtily.

“You don’t like Madame Reinhard; you have a prejudice against her, but you will come round. She does you more justice than you to her.”

"Because she allows that I am not a humbug?" asked Susan, ironically.

"That does not mean, I hope, that you think her one!" exclaimed Helen, almost angrily.

"Oh no, I would not for the world say that, yet I should think it possible she deceives herself."

"She has a great deal to say for her opinions," replied Helen.

"So have most persons who form them according to their wishes."

"She has a great deal to say for her opinions," again repeated Helen, speaking to herself; then looking up suddenly at Susan, she said: "If you were a slave, Susan, should you think it any sin to run away?"

"I don't suppose I should; at any rate, it would be a sore temptation."

"A sore temptation!" repeated Helen; "one would risk life for freedom, and why not happiness?" she added, in an under tone. It seemed as though she were mocking her own words.

Susan looked at her sadly. "Helen," she said, "Madame Reinhard, whatever pleasure she may give you, fails in making you thoroughly happy."

"In that respect she is like every one else," replied Helen; "when have I ever been happy?"

"In your childhood, when we played together by the lake, and made huts in the wood, and said we would love each other all our lives."

Helen shook her head. "No, Susan, no; you are mistaken, I was not happy then. I lived in my own imaginations, but I was not deceived by them; I knew them to be unreal, and all my life I have been searching for reality, and have never found it."

"And do you think that Madame Reinhard will give it you?" asked Susan.



"At least she longs for it, as I do," replied Helen; "we can search for it together. Ah! Susan, you can little comprehend the charm there is in that thought; you who have enjoyed sympathy always."

"Sympathy in my better feelings," said Susan, "not in my fancies. My mother guided me, Helen—that has been my blessing."

"And I have had no guide," exclaimed Helen. "Mamma thinks she is my guide, and asserts a power over me; but how can I submit my reason to forms,—shams? Truth! give me but truth. If it be not mine now, let me be free to seek it. Surely it is one's first duty," she added, her large, speaking eyes bent upon Susan with a look of keen, eager, restless earnestness.

A sense of fear,—of some unknown evil, stole over Susan's heart. She drew near to Helen, and knelt beside her, and said gently: "Helen, you have something on your mind which makes you speak in this way."

"Only a question, a doubt," and Helen laughed, a sharp, harsh laugh. "If I were Louisa Stuart, I would make Shakspeare my mouthpiece:—

"To be or not to be, that is the question:—  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind, to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune;  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And, by opposing, end them?"

But you don't understand, we won't talk any more; it is all nonsense—nothing. Tell me—you have n't told me yet—how did you make your mother and the old Admiral consent to your coming here?"

"By telling them I should like it," replied Susan: "but Helen, I am not going to let you treat me in this strange fashion."

Helen interrupted her, "Telling them you liked it! When I say I like it, I have nay: would you bear that?"

"Helen, dearest, you won't be lectured by me, or I could lecture."

"I will be—yes, I will:" and Helen's manner changed suddenly, and she became grave and gentle. "I love you, Susan; you would be my better angel—you would give me rest if you could."

"I would try to show you where rest is to be found," said Susan. "You seek it in yourself, and it is not there."

"No, indeed, indeed; but, Susan, let me tell you; you have known my life—everything; *you* will not blame me. Rest, and truth, and goodness, they are all phantoms to me; they have come near me," and she slightly shuddered, "and I have tried to grasp them, but they have eluded me. Perhaps it has been my own fault—perhaps I had no power to retain them,—but they are gone now, and they will never return to me again; and so I would try to do without them. If I cannot have the happiness of which I once dreamed, yet I would have freedom,—room for my mind to expand—scope for my intellect. If I am weak myself, so much the more need that I should find strength in the strength of others. But all this is denied me. I am hampered on every side, checked in every longing for what is great and noble; soon I shall be isolated from all I love or care for. When we return to Ivors my life will be a dreary waste."

Susan interrupted her. "Helen, no one has a right to say so who lives, as you do, surrounded by persons who are dependent upon you, and are ready to be influenced by you."

"Influence!" exclaimed Helen. "Oh, Susan! how little you know! Where is the influence of one who has no power of sympathy? You look shocked; but it is true. Education, people say, does everything: if so, I may thank mine for making me what I am. I was never taught to

think of others except to criticise. Ivors was my world, and I knew and cared for nothing beyond it. You know yourself that, whether the persons who lived near us were happy or unhappy,—whether they had tastes and interests like mine, or feelings, or affections, it was of no consequence to me. I was taught to look upon them as something foreign to myself. Occasionally I may have heard anecdotes which seemed to bring them within my powers of comprehension; but my first impulse was to judge their actions by my own standard—the standard of Ivors,—and to condemn them if they differed from it. I have learnt now to laugh at that standard, Susan, but I have not learnt to understand my fellow-creatures. No; care for others, whether poor or rich, will never make Ivors anything to me but a home of dreary monotony.”

“But if it is the scene of your duties,” began Susan.

Helen laughed faintly. “Susan, dear, are you still so innocent? Do you really believe it possible to govern one’s affections by cold duty? You must give up that creed, at least where I am concerned!”

“But you don’t mean to live without sympathy?” exclaimed Susan.

“Not at all, so that it shall be of my own choosing. Give me but the power to choose my friends,—the few whom I may love, and who will love me in return, and I will ask for nothing more; the world may then go its own way.”

“I don’t understand that happiness, Helen,” said Susan, gravely. “It seems to me to be only a form of selfishness.”

“I won’t call it happiness,” replied Helen, quickly, “only the best substitute for it. But I must have it—yes—at all hazards,” she added, in a tone of assumed firmness.

“And what would be your notion of real happiness, then?” asked Susan.

Helen hid her face in her hands, and made no reply.

The dressing-bell rang, and she started up. Her countenance was very pale, and when Susan touched her fingers they were of an icy coldness.

"I must go," she said, trying to draw away the hand which Susan held.

A strong impulse gave Susan strength to say, "Helen, you are deluding yourself, and suffering Madame Reinhard so delude you."

"Freedom!" exclaimed Helen,—a wild glance shot from her eyes.

"Yes, freedom," repeated Susan; "none can be happy without it; but—let me say it, Helen, it is no cant—there is but one true freedom, not outward, but inward,—freedom from ourselves."

Helen smiled scornfully.

"Freedom from the power of our own will," continued Susan—"freedom which shall bring every thought into captivity to a higher law."

Helen shook her head; her lip quivered. "Too late for that!" she exclaimed; "I must be what I have been made—what I am doomed to be;" and almost before Susan had time to speak again she was gone.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

ADMIRAL CLARE was ill. The physician said, not seriously so, and talked of suppressed gout, and hoped that, in a few days, a regular attack would make everything right. Mrs. Graham nursed him unweariedly, and kept up her own spirits and the spirits of every one about her. She would not allow Susan to be sent for, and had always a cheerful plan for

the day for Isabella and Anna, and a hopeful word for Claude Egerton. The word danger was never mentioned; but there was one symptom—it might have been thought superstition to notice it, yet every one did—the old man's irritable and eager spirit had sunk already to rest. He obeyed his doctor, and trusted to his servants; he scarcely uttered an impatient word; but something of a child's confidence had stolen over him,—a belief that all would be well, whatever it might be. It seemed as though he had deliberately resigned his will into the Hands of God.

He had kept his bed about four days, growing, perhaps, a little weaker, but with no other sign of change. Mrs. Graham was sitting in his room, and he was repeating a psalm himself. He did this constantly, not conscious, apparently, that he could be heard. That simple-hearted unreserve which is quite unaware of observation had always been one of his chief characteristics. When the psalm was ended he lay quiet for a little time; and then Mrs. Graham thought that he was asking for some water, and went up to his bedside.

He put out his hand to her, and smiled, and said he was not wanting anything, he had only been thinking aloud. "Very happy thoughts, Frances, but I don't trouble about them. It will all be as God wills."

"Are they thoughts about which I can help in any way, dear sir?"

"No, Frances; no. It is n't for us mortals to meddle in these matters. Only it seems to me now as if the way was opened, and so I was thanking God for it." He paused a moment and added: "Would there be any harm, Frances, in having my little Susan back? I won't ask it if she is better where she is."

"She shall come directly, dear sir, if you have the slightest wish to see her. She wanted to return, as you know,

directly she heard you were ill, but Lady Augusta wrote such an urgent note. '

"She's right,—yes; the child may do more good there than here. Frances, there's a reproach on my conscience. Helen Clare may be a giddy-pated girl, but I should have tried to make her better, instead of calling her so."

"I am afraid you could not have done much," began Mrs. Graham.

"I could have prayed for her," exclaimed the old man, with sudden energy. "If I had said a prayer for every cross word I have spoken about her, perhaps by this time she might have been on her way to Heaven. God forgive me for Jesus Christ's sake," and he joined his hands, and closed his eyes, repeating the words again to himself.

"I trust Helen is on that way now," said Mrs. Graham reverently. "Her faults may be great, but I cannot but think there is a right purpose underneath."

The Admiral was silent for a moment. "Claude Eger-ton has seen my little Susan more latterly, Frances; he has talked to me about her. He would not say to you what he does to me."

Mrs. Graham's manner was a little nervous. She replied: "I am sure Claude esteems Susan highly, but I can't say I have ever seen anything which would make me believe he has any warmer feeling."

"So you always say," replied the Admiral, in a disappointed tone. "But it's as God wills; quite as He wills, remember. I don't want to wish; I ask Him every day not to let me wish. But I love her, He knows why; and so, sometimes, as I lie here, I tell him what I think would be happy for her, and it is letting out my heart. He understands it all, and ordered every thing for me, and for you, and for all, long before the child was thought of; and, Frances, I can say to Him what there's no one here to know anything about."

"Yes," said Mrs. Graham earnestly; "one does feel the blessedness of being understood by God more and more every day."

"And it can't be wrong to think," began the Admiral—he waited, considered, then repeated the words, and added, "I pray Him to teach me if it is."

"Wrong! what? dear sir," asked Mrs. Graham.

His answer was abrupt, as he looked at Mrs. Graham fixedly. "You are n't like your mother, Frances. I have often tried to think you were, but you are not."

"I am like my father," was the quiet reply.

A strange, sad smile passed over the old man's face. "A cause why I ought not to care for you, so people would say. But that was never my fashion. Let my own heart break, so that those I love are happy. But it did n't break, it only shrivelled, dried up for a time; and now it seems fresh again. Perhaps, Frances, God's dew has fallen upon it, and so restored it."

A choking sensation in Mrs. Graham's throat interrupted the answer, and the Admiral continued: "Age makes us young again. You will feel that if you ever come to my time of life. I have lived continually in my youth of late years; and now that God has placed me on my death-bed, and made me helpless, He seems to carry me back to be a child. My little Susan's face is very sweet to me, Frances. I shall like to see her by my side again; only don't let her come if she's needed elsewhere, if she can do good. I can dream," he added, eagerly, and a flash of light sparkled in his dim eye: "it is n't any living features that are needed to help me to do that. God gives me back the memory when my eyes are closed, and He sends no sorrow with it now. They 'neither marry nor are given in marriage' where she is, Frances, and I shall love her there, and tell her that I do, and perhaps—I would n't think of it, if it were seen not to

be God's will,—but perhaps it may be pleasant to her, even in her great joy, to be told that I cared for the child for her sake, and left her on earth happy. Was that Claude's step?"

Claude came into the room. The Admiral's ear had caught the accustomed sound though Mrs. Graham had not heard it.

"Are you better to-day, dear sir? I don't think you look so."

"Yes, Claude, better, always better. When one is nearer to port, one must be so."

Claude glanced uneasily at Mrs. Graham.

"The Admiral has been talking rather more than usual," she said, "and has tired himself. He certainly was better this morning."

"And not at all worse now," said the Admiral, cheerfully. "Sit down, my boy, and tell me what you have been doing. Anything very important last night at the House? Frances has n't read the papers to me to-day."

Claude sat down, and described with minuteness the course of the debates of the previous night, the Admiral listening and occasionally making a remark, which showed that his intellect was in its full vigour. He even debated some important topics with Claude, differing from him, and giving arguments with clear, though perhaps rather prejudiced reasonings. He was much more tolerant, however, of a contrary opinion than he had ever been in health, and frequently interrupted his own train of thought, to remind Claude that "he did n't mean to be positive; an old man of eighty, shut up in a sick room, had no right to be; he begged Claude to forgive him if he was." The conversation interested him so that no personal remarks were made for some time. But Mrs. Graham remarked Claude's face, and saw that his inmost thoughts were troubled, and she could catch also, in the intonation of his voice, something which beto-



kened a wandering attention. After a time the Admiral appeared tired, and said he should like to be quiet, but he would not hear of Claude's going away. He declared that he had not said half he wished to say. "Could n't Claude take a book, and wait for a quarter of an hour?" and Claude, though his time was precious, consented, and went with Mrs. Graham into the dressing-room, the Admiral promising to ring if he wanted them.

"I don't think he is so well to-day," said Claude, as Mrs. Graham took up her work. He could not help feeling annoyed that she was calm, when he saw cause for anxiety, and his tone showed it.

"I don't think he is," was the reply; "but the change has been within the last half hour. He always is worse when he has been exciting himself with conversation, and yet if he likes to talk, it seems hard to try and stop him."

"And you would not think of sending for Miss Graham," asked Claude. He had almost said Susan, the name came to him so familiarly.

"I had not thought of it, at least till this last conversation. Do you see any particular cause?"

"Not exactly." He spoke as if attention was wandering, and added, with abruptness, "Does Miss Graham tell you much of Madame Reinhard?"

"Not very much; she knows I have been so occupied with the Admiral. But what makes you ask?"

"Nothing, nothing;" but the nothing certainly meant something.

Mrs. Graham looked pained. "That will not do for an old friend, Claude."

He caught her hand eagerly, "Thank you, thank you for that name; to hear it from a woman's voice is so sweet!"

"Then you must act towards me like Claude," continued Mrs. Graham. "There is something troubling you; I must know it."

He sat down, and averted his face, as he murmured, "I am horribly weak; it would be impossible to tell any one but you."

"There is no amount of weakness which I cannot sympathise with," said Mrs. Graham. "Remember, I have had much longer experience in it than you."

He smiled doubtfully, and drew a letter from his pocket, but stopped as he was upon the point of giving it.

"You know the Baroness d'Olban?"

"By name."

"And reputation?"

"Yes; but one is unwilling to believe all that is said."

"Believe all, and more than all," said Claude, emphatically, "and you will not be far from the truth. She is Madame Reinhard's friend, therefore——" he paused.

"Helen's," said Mrs. Graham, gently.

He rose from his seat impetuously. "No, never, never; at least not yet," he added, checking himself sadly. "But I want to explain. This letter was shown me by an acquaintance, I can scarcely call him a friend, of my own. It is addressed by Madame Reinhard to the Baroness d'Olban. No secret was made of it; it was spoken of as a good joke. It concerns——" he stopped; his voice was husky—"the subject to which it alludes was first made public by Madame Reinhard. There is no reason perhaps, you will say, why I should trouble myself about what two such women may choose to say. But read it, read it—tell me what you would feel if one of your own daughters was discussed in that way. Oh, Helen! Helen!" and Claude threw himself into a chair, and groaned aloud.

Mrs. Graham read the letter. It was, as Claude had said, addressed by Madame Reinhard to the Baroness d'Olban, and written in a style of witty, but vulgar, confidential intimacy. It alluded to previous conversations, and

facts, which were evidently well known, and these of a most painful and humiliating kind as regarded Helen. It seemed that the chance of her marriage with Captain Mordaunt had become a common topic of amusing speculation, owing to Madame Reinhard's incautiousness, and Captain Mordaunt's absence of all delicacy of feeling. Captain Mordaunt appeared to have made Madame Reinhard his confidante, whilst she communicated all that passed to the Baroness d'Olban. Helen's name was bandied about at clubs, and the letter alluded to bets which had been laid as to the chances of her marriage, and especially to one which had been accepted by Captain Mordaunt, depending upon Helen's consenting, before another week had gone by, to be his wife.

Mrs. Graham laid the letter upon the table with a very grave air.

Claude looked up; but waited for her to speak.

"I would ask one question," she said; "is it authentic?"

"Could I make myself miserable for a doubt?" he exclaimed. "I heard the reports and the bets myself. I inquired how they arose; the thing was quite public. This letter, as I told you, was given to me without scruple by a person to whom it had been shown as a capital joke."

"It is beneath Madame Reinhard," said Mrs. Graham; "it is so low."

"She knows well how to please the person whom she addresses. Wit is all the Baroness cares for."

"To plan deliberately,—to show such an entire absence of delicacy of mind—such an utter disregard for Helen's feelings!" said Mrs. Graham; "it seems impossible."

"She is false!" exclaimed Claude. "The very first evening that I saw her she told me that her acquaintance with the Baroness d'Olban was slight; I soon found that they were together constantly. When I discovered this I resolved to watch; and I have mixed with their set, and

learnt—Oh, Mrs. Graham ! death would be better than to see Helen what they are. She has deceived and disappointed me ; she is but the wreck of what she once was ; but she cannot be to me merely what other women are. No ; let her marry whom she will,”—his lips quivered, but he recovered himself—“ only let it be with her eyes open.”

“ Captain Mordaunt is the most to blame,” began Mrs. Graham.

Claude interrupted her. “ A weak, vain, miserable wretch, what could he do against an artful woman of the world ?—the odds are not equal. When Madame Reinhard made up her mind to get him into her toils, she had but to flatter him, and the work was done.”

“ Intolerable ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Graham. “ Lady Augusta must interfere.”

“ And ruin everything,” said Claude. “ Madame Reinhard has at least done me this favour ; she has gossiped so freely about Lady Augusta’s domestic affairs, that I am as well acquainted with them as if I had been living in her house. Lady Augusta upholds Captain Mordaunt ; even if she knew these facts, she might do so still ; if not, Helen is in that state of mind, that the very slightest opposition from her step-mother would drive her to assert her own independence : she would marry instantly.”

“ After seeing this letter ? Impossible ! ”

“ Ah ! you don’t know.” A heavy sigh escaped him.

“ You wish me to interfere,” said Mrs. Graham.

“ I don’t know what I wish. The letter was given me only the moment before I came here : I have had no time to think.” He put his hand to his forehead.

“ Helen has sometimes listened to me,” said Mrs. Graham ; “ but there is an immense difficulty in interfering without Lady Augusta’s knowledge : I must go either to her or to Sir Henry.”

"And do nothing!" exclaimed Claude. "Forgive me, but Sir Henry would instantly put the affair into his wife's hands. There is no one but Helen that can rule Helen," he added, bitterly.

Mrs. Graham thought for a moment. "We must take the right step," she said, "and leave consequences. Lady Augusta must know best what should be done."

Claude made a gesture of impatience. "Lady Augusta knows the hours for daily service in every church in London, and she can tell you where to find the best singing and the finest preachers; she can give you, too, as much ecclesiastical gossip as you may have a fancy to hear, and more, perhaps, than you may like; but what other knowledge she possesses which may be of use to her daughter, I confess I have yet to learn."

"It is very unfortunate," said Mrs. Graham. "But Lady Augusta's mania, whatever it might be, was always absorbing."

"This is a worse mania than any other," replied Claude. "It disgusts really earnest people, and throws discredit upon things in themselves worthy of all reverence. Of all play-things, religion is the most dangerous; touch it for amusement, and its wound is deadly; and Lady Augusta will feel this by-and-by. She has made her daughter indifferent; before long she will make her a sceptic."

Mrs. Graham started.

"With Madame Reinhard and the Baroness d'Olban for her friends," exclaimed Claude, "how can she escape? Dear Mrs. Graham, you know as well as I do that it is not by church services, nor devotional books, nor religious conversation, that a mind like Helen's can be influenced. The sight of an earnest, practical, humble life would, through God's mercy, have made her religious; but she has never had it. Why should she love religion, or even believe in it? It is *to her merely another form of vanity and excitement.*"

"Yet Helen ought to see through Madame Reinhard," said Mrs. Graham. "She has sufficient truth in herself to detect falsehood."

"But not sufficient knowledge of the world," replied Claude, quickly. "She is too guileless to be suspicious."

"And she was taught prejudice from her infancy," continued Mrs. Graham, thoughtfully. "That may be one cause of her being so easily misled. I have remarked in other cases, where girls have been brought up on a system of exclusiveness, that their feelings become intensified, whilst their power of judgment is narrowed; and so any person admitted to their intimacy is likely to become an idol, merely because there is no one else with whom a comparison can be made."

"Lady Augusta would say, I suppose, that she did give Helen opportunities of forming a judgment," said Claude, ironically. "She brought her to London, and allowed her to rush through a London season."

"Three months' residence in London will not undo the work of nine months in the country, and the training of years previous," said Mrs. Graham. "Exclusiveness may be altered by it in form, but it certainly won't be destroyed, for it is the habit of the mind. A girl educated like Helen does not know what it is to have sympathies in common with her fellow-creatures. She likes or dislikes simply as a matter of taste, and always in reference to her own fancy. No; I suspect we may close our great gates, and flatter ourselves that evil in a carriage-and-four can't enter, and then find that self-conceit has glided in unperceived by the wicked. People seem to me to forget that education is as necessary to enable us to form our judgment of persons as of books. However, we are doing no good in discussing all this now. The question is, what is to be done?"

"Leave it all," said Claude, despondingly. "I am foolish to trouble myself about the matter."

"You forget that Helen is my sister's child," said Mrs. Graham.

"Yes, I do forget it," he exclaimed. "When I think of her surrounded by the cant of religion and philosophy, about to rush upon her ruin, I forget that she is, or could be, anything but the pupil of Lady Augusta Clare."

"We must not be severe," said Mrs. Graham.

He looked at her in surprise. "Am I severe? God knows——" he paused: his manner quite changed, as he added, "I would wish to be guided by you."

Mrs. Graham considered. Then she said, rather hesitatingly, "Your opinion of Madame Reinhard would go far to second the impression made by this letter."

"Mine! Mrs. Graham, you know Helen well. Have you never heard from her the sharp laugh, which rings as though it were struck from metal? That laugh would be the answer if she were told my opinion of Madame Reinhard. No; there is one person—only one—your daughter, Susan. I have thought that she might find an opportunity, only I should be so sorry—so grieved—to trouble her mind with such subjects."

"I have never kept from Susan any subjects, by knowing which she could be useful to others," said Mrs. Graham. "I believed the necessity would neutralise the harm. Besides, I have always observed that the mischief of the knowledge of evil consists, not in the facts, but in the mode in which they are communicated. Whatever I have, at any time, thought it desirable that my children should know, I have, therefore, told them myself in as simple, and straightforward, and unmysterious a manner as I possibly could. Susan would hear anything I might tell her, whether about this matter or any other of the same kind, without receiving any great moral shock. She knows that there is a great deal of evil in the world, and she will not become false, or sceptical,

or careless in her conduct because cases of the kind are brought before her. Still it requires a great deal of consideration before one can determine that it is right she should be mixed up with this business."

A loud tingling of the Admiral's bell at that moment interrupted the conversation. Mrs. Graham hastened to answer it. Claude left the letter and the envelope on the table, and would have hurried after her, but she motioned to him to remain. He went to the window and stood there, thinking. His countenance expressed feelings of mingled scorn and suffering, and again and again he put his hand to his brow, as though the weight of sorrowful care were pressing him down beyond his usual powers of endurance. A knock at the door was twice repeated before he heard it. Isabella entered, and, surprised at seeing him, was going away again; but Mrs. Graham's voice from the inner room summoned Claude in an eager, frightened tone. He rushed into the next room. Isabella lingered in the dressing-room, afraid to advance further.

The Admiral's faintness had partially returned; his face was deathlike, but consciousness was left. He feebly kept Claude's hand in his, whilst Mrs. Graham tried every means to restore him. It was a work of time and difficulty; one moment he would rally, but the next he sank back again. Isabella stole into the room, hoping to be useful, and was sent to call Barnes, and write a note to the Admiral's physician; and when this was done she came back to station herself in the dressing-room, and was told that "the Admiral was better. Mr. Egerton and Barnes had managed to raise him. There was no confusion of the mind,—he knew them all; but he seemed distressed because Susan was not there, and a message was to be sent to her." Isabella offered to write it, and went back to the dressing-room for the purpose.

Mrs. Graham and Claude stood by the Admiral's bed.



The old man feebly and uneasily turned his head from side to side, looking for some one.

"Susan will be here very soon, dear sir," said Mrs. Graham, gently.

But he scarcely smiled. His eye rested on Claude.

"She will be here almost directly, sir," repeated Claude. "The note will be finished and sent in a few minutes."

"She won't come—she won't understand," murmured the Admiral.

"Oh, yes! Susan understands more quickly than any one," replied Mrs. Graham, "especially where those she loves are concerned."

"I am sure she won't delay a moment," added Claude, earnestly.

The Admiral's dim eye became quite keen in its expression. He glanced at Claude, and said, "I'm not going to die."

An irrepressible smile crossed Claude's face as he answered, "We hope you are going to be a great deal better, dear sir."

"Not so much chance of that," murmured the Admiral. "Frances"—Mrs. Graham bent down to him—"he'd much better go than write."

Claude heard the words. "Yes, I will go, sir, willingly, directly;" yet he hesitated.

Mrs. Graham read what was passing in his mind. "Dr. Markham will be here presently," she said, "and you may be wanted."

"Wanted? what for?" said the Admiral, quickly.

"There may be something to be done,—Claude may make himself useful," replied Mrs. Graham.

The Admiral looked at Claude very earnestly. "I wish you to go," he said, in a feeble voice; and then he was heard

muttering to himself, as though making an apology: "it will save her a fright,—he'll explain."

Claude moved away; Mrs. Graham followed him. "We must not fret him," she said; "you had better go. If you ask for Susan, that will be all that is necessary. And will you tell Isabella that the note is not wanted?"

She pressed Claude's hand affectionately. He stood lingering, longing to say more, till the Admiral's voice was heard at the highest pitch which his strength allowed: "Is Claude gone? why does n't he go?"

And Claude then went into the dressing-room to give his message to Isabella. She was sitting at her desk, writing; some note-paper and two or three envelopes were lying by her side. "This is mine, I think," said Claude, observing the direction of that which he had shown to Mrs. Graham. Part of a letter was still in it; the remainder lay upon the table, rather hidden by the desk, and he did not remark it; neither did Isabella till Claude was gone, and she had finished writing, and moved away her desk; and then she took it up, and looked at it; and, finding it was something which did not belong to her, imagined it must have been addressed to her mother, and put it into the pocket of her blotting-book, to be kept safely.

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## CHAPTER LIX.

HELEN CLARE sat alone in the little morning-room adjoining the drawing-room. Her cheek was pale, her eyelids were heavy and swollen, her lips pressed together, as though she had forgotten to smile; and before her lay two letters, one worn, and creased, and blotted, on which many tears might

have fallen ; the other fresh and new, written in large characters, upon glazed note paper, with the stamped crest of nobility at the top of the page. Helen's thoughts did not take the form of soliloquy. People soliloquise on the stage for the benefit of the audience, but very rarely in real life for their own. And Helen was not in a state to carry on any regular train of thought. She was, indeed, upon the verge of the great decision, by which, once again, she was to bind herself for life ; and at every sound of the distant opening of a door, she listened and trembled, in the expectation that the interview which, at Madame Reinhard's instigation, she had consented to grant, and which she felt must determine her fate, was close at hand. But she had not reached this point by thought, but rather, as is the case with thousands, when bent upon their own destruction, by not thinking. She was about to commit a moral suicide, and she walked deliberately forward, closing her eyes to consequences, and stopping her ears to every voice, except that which whispered, in the charmed accents of Madame Reinhard, that marriage, if it were not happiness, would at least be freedom.

But we are ingenious self-tormentors. And now, resolved upon the act which was to place a barrier between herself and the days gone by, insurmountable even in the eyes of the world, Helen could not resist one lingering glance at the past, a glance strangely mingled, of curiosity and repentance. How had she felt towards Claude ? She had almost forgotten. Time, new scenes, new associations, the excitement of the present, had so blended conflicting feelings, that she could not recall them. She took up his letter,—the few lines—the last which she ever received from him,—in which, without one word of reproach, he had expressed his acquiescence in the sentence that parted them.

"Helen," it said, "you have decided wisely. I have neither the right nor the wish to complain. We are not suited, and I could never have made you happy. But let me say in self-defence,—for I shall never again have the opportunity,—that the last thought in my mind was that of subjecting you to *my* will. My dream was of a law which should rule us both,—the law of mutual love, and of willing dedication of ourselves to God. May we both be saved from the unutterable wretchedness of seeking for happiness without it!

"Do not think I shall forget you; it is impossible: your name will still be treasured amongst my dearest, though saddest memories; and when I hear that you are blest, I shall feel that I am blest myself.

"CLAUDE EGERTON."

Oh! the pang of shame, of self-reproach, which struck Helen's heart, as she read these lines, and then glanced at the note upon the table!

Claude and Captain Mordaunt! she would not, could not, ought not to think of them together; and she rose up, and paced the room, and with a strong resolution, dashed away the rising tear, and crushed, with unsparing hand, the purer, holier longings, which those few words had caused to spring up in her heart.

Footsteps upon the stairs! Helen turned pale; she caught up the letter, and sat down. Men's voices in the lobby! She had almost rushed through the door, opening into the drawing-room, and escaped.

Yet why? her will was her own. Now, now, at the last moment, she might draw back; she had given no open encouragement, beyond receiving a note of silly compliment; she had only said to Madame Reinhard, that if Captain Mordaunt called she would see him. Coward! why should

she be afraid to listen to him, to hear all that he would say, and trust herself, if she saw fit, to reject him? She took up her work, and the needle fell from her trembling hand; she stooped to find it, and at that moment the door opened.

When she looked up, Claude Egerton was standing before her.

Cold, stern, self-possessed, not a line of his countenance betraying the slightest emotion, confronting her without embarrassment;—and Helen shrank from his eye like a guilty thing, and her voice was scarcely audible, as, in reply to his question, whether he might be allowed to see Miss Graham, she replied, "I believe so. Perhaps she may be gone out; I will go and see."

He stopped her. "The servant will let me know. I would not give you the trouble. I came to take her away. Admiral Clare is very ill."

A thundering knock at the street door! Helen could not rise from her seat; if she had attempted it, she must have fallen to the ground. She made no reply to Claude's information.

He could not help seeing how ill she looked, and he remarked it.

She said it was the noise; she was startled by it. Her eye turned to the door, and Claude's glance followed the same direction.

A little page entered with a note. "The gentleman had left it, and would call again in a few minutes."

Helen tore it open without an apology. "Visitors are to be shown into the drawing-room," she said, hurriedly; and the page left the room.

"I am in your way," observed Claude.

Helen's smile was ghastly. "My cousin will be here directly," she said. "She went out with Mamma. I don't know where she is."

Again she took up her work, and both were silent.

Claude said something more about Admiral Clare. Helen seemed scarcely to hear him. He talked for some minutes, and mentioned Madame Reinhard's name, and asked if Helen saw much of her, and watched the reply.

Helen said, "She must be gone out." She thought Claude was speaking of Susan.

Another knock. Claude took up his hat, and remarked that there must be a visitor. He would wait in Sir Henry's study, if he might be allowed.

"It does not signify; there is no hurry," said Helen, nervously. She seemed afraid now that he would leave her.

But he insisted upon going; she could not stop him; but she murmured something about Susan, and went to the door, and looked out into the lobby.

Claude followed her closely. Captain Mordaunt was coming up the stairs. Claude saw the burning colour rise to Helen's cheeks, and with a feeling that was almost maddening, he rushed past Captain Mordaunt without speaking, and entered Sir Henry's study. There, even there, before the door closed, he heard the free confidential tone in which Helen was addressed; her confused hesitating reply, whilst, as if certain of the footing on which he stood, Captain Mordaunt followed her into the little study.

No, it was too late; and Claude knelt down and prayed for her.

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## CHAPTER LX.

LADY AUGUSTA CLARE'S carriage was seen standing before a small house, in a dull street, in the neighbourhood of Belgravia. A page, duly buttoned and tutored, was at the open door.

"Lady Louisa Stuart's, my love; you won't mind calling with me, I hope," said Lady Augusta; and Susan acquiesced, and was ushered up the narrow stairs. Ormolu, porcelain, Bohemian glass, papier mâché, gilding, beads, Berlin work, books in blue and crimson—such a profusion of prettinesses; and Lady Louisa, dressed in the youthful style of three-and-twenty, flounces and ribands, and with the simplest, slightest apology for a cap, and seated at an inlaid table, writing with a gold pen upon superfine paper! Nothing could be more touching, or prospectively bride-like. "My dear Lady Augusta," she exclaimed, "come at last! I have been waiting, 'chiding the lagging hours,' till I saw you. And Miss Graham, too! I thought it had been fair Helen."

"Helen is engaged at home. I supposed you would think me unkind, if I didn't call," said Lady Augusta, bluntly.

She seated herself; her countenance and attitude severe.

Lady Louisa, with an air of uncomfortable misgiving, addressed herself to Susan.

"I have not seen Helen for an age, but I trust that time is working wonders for her."

"Helen is quite well," said Lady Augusta, quickly.

"Ah! she has been taught by Proteus,

" 'Cease to lament for that thou canst not help!'

I should have called to see her long before this, but I have been so occupied."

Lady Louisa's eyes were modestly cast upon the ground.

"Do you mean to be married in London, Louisa?" said Lady Augusta.

"You ask a difficult question; there is much to be thought of. Indeed, I have had no time for thought."

"So I imagined," said Lady Augusta: "one of my reasons for calling to-day was to say, that Sir Henry disap-

proves of Helen's accepting your offer of having her as one of the bridesmaids."

Lady Louisa coloured. "Indeed! I should have thought, that considering former friendship and relationship—yet I suppose it may be natural: there must be painful reminiscences; things might have been so different."

"You had better get older bridesmaids, Louisa," continued Lady Augusta; "they will look much better."

For a moment Lady Louisa was discomposed; but she quickly recovered herself. "There has been a difficulty about bridesmaids," she said: "the Count has so few relations in England, and all my own particular friends are married, and so indeed are most of the young ladies of Helen's age. This is her third season, I believe." Lady Augusta would not vouchsafe a reply, and Lady Louisa addressed Susan. "You rather despise London seasons, I believe, Miss Graham."

"I have never had the opportunity, because I have never had the experience of them," said Susan.

"Aptly answered. No doubt you devote yourself to the sciences?"

"I devote myself to whatever may happen to come," replied Susan, laughing. "Everything is new to me."

"And you are staying with the Admiral; and of course you see Petruchio? how fares he?"

"Mr. Egerton was very well when we last met," replied Susan: "but I have not seen him for some days."

"Very well, is he! of course meaning very happy?" and Lady Louisa gave such a peculiar glance at Susan, that she blushed, without knowing why. "Well, it is but what Rosalind says: 'The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love cause.'"

"You speak from experience, I suppose, Louisa?" said Lady Augusta, sharply.



"Nay, how can it be my own?" said Lady Louisa, with a satirical smile. "I leave it to Helen to inflict the test. But, seriously, I am comforted to hear that Petruchio bears up against his trial. He will scarcely, I suppose, venture upon another Kate?" And again Lady Louisa determinately looked at Susan.

"You talked of the Count's relations," said Lady Augusta, abruptly; "who are they?"

"Who? A wide question; one must be learned in the blood royal of Poland to answer it," said Lady Louisa.

"I never heard that Poland had a blood royal," observed Lady Augusta, drily. "I suppose their names all end in *ski*; and I should advise you, Louisa, to take care that their honours don't do the same, and melt into thin air."

Lady Louisa only smiled, with a pity that was more nearly akin to contempt than to love.

Susan felt that the conversation was becoming uncomfortable, and, to divert it, asked if Lady Louisa had seen Miss Manners lately.

"This morning, only; she is just gone: and that reminds me—I was so sorry to hear from her such a bad account of the Admiral. She had been calling in Cavendish Square, and was not admitted: seeing you here, however, I trust the report is exaggerated."

Susan looked surprised, but scarcely uneasy. "It must have been a mistake," she said. "I should certainly have been told if he were worse. Last evening the account was much better."

"Indeed! I dare say it was." Lady Louisa evidently thought the matter not of the slightest consequence, and turned to Lady Augusta.

"I am afraid I shall scarcely have the pleasure of seeing Sir Henry, and yourself, and fair Helen, on the twentieth of next month. Rumour whispers that you are intending to leave London about that time."

"We talk of it," said Lady Augusta, stiffly. "But the twentieth! you are carrying on matters quickly."

"Yes; and overwhelmed with business in consequence. I may with truth say, 'I have to-day dispatched sixteen businesses a month's length a-piece.' But the Count has no mercy. Miss Graham ——"

Susan started at the sound of her own name. "Ah! your thoughts were elsewhere; forgive me."

"I was thinking of the Admiral," said Susan. "Did you say that Miss Manners had been calling in Cavendish Square to-day?"

"Only just before she came here. Mr. Egerton, she was told, had gone to Grosvenor Place with some message for you."

Susan stood up; her face flushed and very anxious. "If I had only known," she began, whilst looking at Lady Augusta, and expecting her at once to say that they would go: but no response was made, and she left her sentence unfinished, and sat down again.

"Where do you mean to go for your wedding tour, Louisa?" asked Lady Augusta.

"It is uncertain. So many are busy with advice upon the subject, that we are constantly changing our minds. Sometimes it is France, sometimes Italy, occasionally Germany. But doubtless we shall have the pleasure of meeting abroad if, as rumour has again whispered, you are projecting a tour on the continent."

Lady Augusta would not reciprocate the wish; and in the pause that followed Susan again hoped that she would move.

Lady Louisa at length observed the expression of her face. "You are anxious, I am afraid?" she said. "I have disturbed your peace of mind."

Susan tried to smile, and answered, "A little. But I shall hear *everything* from Mr. Egerton."

"You could not have a better messenger," said Lady Louisa; "so entirely considerate."

"You were not used to speak so favourably of Claude," observed Lady Augusta, sharply.

"Was I not? that was because the world spoke so well of him that there was no need. I may occasionally have laughed at Petruchio,—I have an unhappy knack of laughing at every one,—but I never could do anything but respect him, and suppose that others would have sense enough to do the same."

Lady Augusta rose suddenly. "Susan," she said, "we shall be late for church; are you ready?" Susan put down her veil, wished Lady Louisa good-bye, and walked to the further end of the room. Lady Augusta lingered.

"And you really can give me no hope of seeing you on the twentieth, Augusta?" said Lady Louisa, feeling a little mollified at the last moment, and anxious to have the sanction of such a dignified presence. "There will be little enough to offer in the way of entertainment. My aunt comes to preside and act the lady of the house; and we shall have but few guests, and nothing splendid. With my small establishment it could not be otherwise."

Lady Augusta looked round to see if Susan was near, and then answered, "This is not the time to talk seriously, yet I may not have another opportunity. Louisa, though you forget appearances, I don't. What can this unknown Polish youth be to you?"

Lady Louisa cast her eyes to the ground and answered,—

"'Thou art an elm, my husband; I, a vine,  
Whose weakness married to thy stronger state,  
Makes me with thy strength to communicate.'

Is not that answer enough? Would you not be happy if Helen could say the same?"

"At one-and-twenty, yes," said Lady Augusta; "and if he man were worth her having."

Lady Louisa smiled bitterly. "And Helen says at one-and-twenty, no! though the man may be worth ever so much. Take care that she does not say it too often."

Lady Augusta drew her shawl round her, and allowed Lady Louisa's hand to drop from her grasp.

Susan followed her down stairs in silence. When they were both seated in the carriage, Lady Augusta threw herself back, and exclaimed, "Intolerable idiot! she is worth no better fate. Now, Susan, for church."

But Susan had a request to make:—She could not go to church; Mr. Egerton was waiting for her, and she wished to see him.

Lady Augusta's eye rested upon her with a sudden gleam of suspicion. "Mr. Egerton! why should he be sent? They can't wish you to go back with him?"

"I don't know,—I have not thought about it,—only I am so very anxious:" and Susan's feelings, repressed during the interview with Lady Louisa, struggled to gain vent, and tears stood in her eyes.

Lady Augusta spoke again, and more sternly: "This is weakness, Susan; I don't like weakness; I warn you against it. You had much better go with me first; it will strengthen you."

Susan's tears were repressed in an instant. "I am never afraid of not having strength given me when I am doing my duty," she said, "whether it may be in church or out of church. If Mamma wishes me to return, I must."

Lady Augusta's face showed great displeasure; she murmured, "Mr. Egerton must be very intimate!" and then, pulling the check-string, gave an order that the carriage should take her to church, and afterwards carry Miss Graham back to Grosvenor Place.

She did not utter another word during the remainder of the drive, and Susan mechanically watched the crowds moving through the streets, whilst thinking of the Admiral's illness, and her mother's message, and in the depth of her heart nursing a vague feeling of mingled happiness, shame, and foreboding,—now, for the first time, assuming a definite form, and based upon those few words, "Mr. Egerton must be very intimate!"

The carriage stopped in Grosvenor Place. Susan woke up as from a troubled dream when the clamorous knock was given. She almost opened the carriage herself to rush into the house; but a conflicting feeling kept her back. She asked for Mr. Egerton, and was shown into Sir Henry's study.

Claude sat there alone; his back was towards the door, and he turned impatiently as she entered. Susan saw his face, and her heart sank. Sallow, dark, agitated! she read in it at once the confirmation of her worst fears.

"He is dying!" she exclaimed: "you are come to tell me of it!" and she burst into tears.

Claude became more calm; he seemed in a moment to throw aside self, and his manner was full of a brother's tenderness. He ventured to take her hand: he spoke gently and soothingly. "The Admiral," he said, "was not so well, and was wishing to see her. There was nothing serious yet: of course, all changes for the worse must cause uneasiness. Perhaps Susan could return at once in Lady Augusta's carriage if it was still waiting?"

Susan had sat down, but she rose directly, her tears gone, composed, reasonable, as she always was. She felt that Claude's eye was upon her; it made her self-conscious; she could not understand what it meant, and lingered, thinking he had something else to say.

"Your presence will be a great comfort," he continued;

"Mrs. Graham has been wanting you sadly. Shall you be ready directly?"

"Yes, in one instant. I will give directions to Annette, and she will take care of everything for me, and then I will say good-bye to Helen."

Claude's countenance changed; he tried to speak and failed.

"Ought I not to wait even for that? Have you kept anything back from me?" exclaimed Susan.

"Nothing, nothing!" He walked towards the window that his face might not be seen, and Susan dared not ask him another question. She went to her room, rang for Annette, and gave her directions, and inquired if Miss Clare was in the drawing-room.

"In the boudoir, I believe, mademoiselle; and I think there is a visitor there." Annette had her own suspicions, but she would not betray them.

"Then ask if she can see me for one moment; tell her I am going home; that Admiral Clare is very ill." Susan followed Annette down the stairs, and waited in the lobby. She heard voices; Captain Mordaunt's was easily recognised; its tones were eager. What Helen replied was inaudible, but she came out looking flushed and confused; she scarcely seemed to understand what Susan said.

"Going, are you, dearest? so suddenly! I am so sorry. But you will come back again? the Admiral will soon be better."

"I am afraid they won't be able to spare me again, dear Helen; and you will be leaving London soon."

"I don't know. Did you leave Mamma at church? Is she coming back? Shall you take the carriage? I think I am quite bewildered by these changes." And Helen pressed her hand across her brow.

The footman came up the stairs. "I am desired to say,

ma'am, that, if you don't go at once, there won't be time to take you to Cavendish Square, and to return for my lady."

"I must go, Helen, dearest; one word only, don't be led."

Helen's laugh was sharp and grating; she made no answer.

"Hark! there is Mr. Egerton's voice; he is waiting: dearest, good-bye."

The touch of that icy clammy hand which was laid in hers! Susan never forgot it. She ran down stairs; and Helen stood at the top and watched Claude come out of the study and take Susan to the carriage, saying kind, gentle words of comfort. A cloud of intense, irrepressible agony passed across her face, and her fingers were laid on the handle of the boudoir door. Yet she lingered. The lock was moved involuntarily, and the slight sound decided her. She entered, and before the interview ended she was engaged to Captain Mordaunt.

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## CHAPTER LXI.

CLAUDE talked a good deal during that short drive; it seemed that he feared to trust himself with silence. He gave Susan details of the Admiral's illness, anticipated her questions, and seemed to know by instinct everything which interested her. She became more uneasy as symptoms were disclosed which her mother had kept from her, and the hysterical choking feeling which had before overpowered her returned again; but she controlled it, and talked quietly and with more unreserve than was her wont. She felt relief *in being able to say what was in her mind to one who could*

understand ; and Claude, as he listened to her, found repose in the deep, yet unexcited feeling, which she expressed.

"I am so much obliged to you for coming for me," said Susan, as they reached Cavendish Square. She half put out her hand to him, and then drew it back again. But he took it cordially, and answered,

"I have to thank you. It has been a comfort ; it is always a great pleasure to do anything for you. I hope you think that." Susan's colour came and went quickly ; she hurried away from him. Claude's eye followed her as she went up stairs.

She was not Helen ; but she had given him what Helen never could—rest.

That evening Susan sat beside the Admiral's bed, her hand laid upon the coverlid, and his resting upon it ; his fingers every now and then moving, as though he would convince himself by touch that she was still there. She was telling him about her visit, talking to him of Helen and Lady Augusta. He listened, not perhaps with pleasure, for the old associations aroused something like irritable feelings, yet with interest, and some satisfaction in the confession of his own repentance. It was more unreserved to Susan than it had been to her mother. He said that it humbled him to think how uncharitable he had been ; he had indulged the feeling against his better conscience ; people little knew how the hard words, said perhaps with half the hard meaning put upon them, would rise up on a death-bed. Probably he should never see Helen again, but he begged Susan to give his love to her. "I can say that truly now," he added. "When the world's troubles are coming to a close, the world's dislikes die ; and she's not likely to stand in your way, my little one ; that's a human thought, but it's a great help."



"I don't understand; Helen never did stand in my way," said Susan.

"Not that you saw, my child, you were too innocent; but we mustn't talk about that. Where's Claude. Can't you all come in for prayers before he goes to the House; and then I should feel ready for the night."

"Mr. Egerton is with mamma, I think, and she is writing a note to the Rector, as you wished, to ask if he can arrange about to-morrow for the Holy Communion."

"Ah! yes; all well. I can wait!" The Admiral's head sank back on his pillow. Presently he said, "If it had been God's will, I should have been glad to see you happy, my pretty one; but since it's not, I don't complain. Only if the time comes, you'll think of me."

"I am happy," said Susan; "I should be, that is, if you were better."

"No cause to let that disturb your happiness, child. The 'peace that passeth understanding' is better than earth's joy. But life is before you, Susan, and I pray God to bless it for you."

"In His way," said Susan, earnestly.

"Yes; you are right, you are right—in His way; but that's a hard way sometimes."

"Still if it has His blessing——" began Susan.

"It must be well in the end. You feel that, do you?" He looked at her intently, turning his head to read more in the answer than the words would convey.

"I think I do," said Susan; "but I have had very little trial."

"It will come," he continued, "sooner or later, in some form or other; but bear up bravely, my child. Each day has its own sorrow, but each day has also its own strength; and as we draw nearer the close of our journey, the sorrow decreases and the strength increases. It is a pleasant thing,

an, to stand at the foot of the great hill of life, and feel we are mounting to the top : and it is sobering and very mn to rest there when we've reached it, and look down a the path by which we are to descend, with the grave ading our view, and never from that time to be lost to t. But the upward journey is slow and toilsome; the nward, rapid and easy. Whatever your burden may be he upward way, my child, cast it upon God, and He will you to bear it; and when the downward path begins, will, through His Grace, cease to feel its weight. But n't know why I go off in this strain," he added, check-himself. "I always want to talk of bright things to Susan, but somehow the thoughts wander off into sad- . Can't you call Claude now? I'm getting tired."

They came—Claude, Mrs. Graham, Isabella, and Anna d knelt with Susan around the bed. Claude came est to the Admiral that he might hear the prayers, and old man beckoned to Susan, and made her kneel next. eye rested upon them with a lingering gaze of indescrib- , longing affection, whilst Claude waited to begin; and , making a sudden effort, he folded his hands, and said, ow I am ready." And Claude read the evening prayers hich he was accustomed. The Admiral followed them, aloud, till towards the end, when his voice failed. ide looked up alarmed, but the Admiral motioned to to go on. At the close he stretched out his hand feebly, touched Claude, and murmured Susan's name.

"We are both here, dear sir," said Claude; and Susan oached and put her hand within that of the Admiral.

"Both," murmured the old man. He felt for Claude's l, and joined it with Susan's. "Be kind to her, Claude; ind."

They were the last words he spoke. Another fainting ame on, from which he never entirely rallied, and before ight,—Admiral Clare was dead.

## CHAPTER LXII.

SUSAN spent the greater part of the next day lying upon the sofa in the dark, desolate drawing-room; desolate, not because it was changed in its outward appearance, but because the spirit which had filled it was fled. She was ill; the shock had come upon her very suddenly. The love of the aged is a less exciting, but perhaps a prouder possession than the affection of the young; it calls forth all our best feelings; it is nourished by reverence, humility, and unselfishness. There had been but little romance in Susan's life, so the world would have said; but there is romance in every pure and holy affection, and Susan's daily work had been refined and ennobled by the consciousness that all which she did, though possessing no intrinsic value, was precious in the old man's sight as the living memory of his youth. The feeling was gone now; she had one interest less in life, one person less for whom lovingly to sacrifice her own will, and that is a great loss to the affectionate and the unselfish. But she was not miserable, as she expected to be. She had given way, in momentary physical weakness, to a passionate burst of sorrow, but now she was calm again; more than calm—peaceful and hopeful. Mrs. Graham and Claude were busy. They had arrangements to make, painful, and admitting of no delay. Anna was her mother's right hand, and Isabella was occupied in writing letters. At another time Susan would have been fretted by the thought that others were exerting themselves without her; but the shock upon her nerves had destroyed this longing for activity. She was told that it was her duty to be quiet, and she acquiesced without remonstrance. All that she now needed was to lie in the dark room, and dream over the closing moments of

the Admiral's consciousness—dream of them, dwell upon them, with intense love, with bitter regret; yet with an under-current of happier feeling, indefinite, unrealised. Was it faith? was it the thought that the labour of life was over, and he whom she loved was at rest?

Alas, for the deceitfulness of the human heart!

Some one entered the drawing-room. Susan started up, but she felt weak and dizzy, and her head sank back again upon the cushion. She was vexed with herself, but she could only lie quite still, and resolve to speak as though nothing was the matter.

Claude drew near the sofa, and Susan made another unavailing attempt to sit up, and then smiled, and said it was no use, she must consent to be good for nothing; but it was very trying.

Claude paused before he replied. Susan could not clearly distinguish his face in the imperfect light; but he sat down wearily.

"Mamma will wear herself out, I am afraid," observed Susan; "it seems hard not to be able to help her."

"But you must not try yet. I hope you won't think of it," he said, quickly. "I came to tell you what we thought of doing, if it would not worry you. You are sure, quite sure you would not rather be left alone?"

Susan heard his voice tremble, and her own heart throbbed so painfully that she could scarcely answer intelligibly: "Thank you: you are very kind to remember me."

He interrupted her. "Don't tell me I am kind; all I can do is nothing. If you would only let me be of service to you—now, always. Mrs. Graham talks of going back to Wingfield immediately. You won't regret that, though I may."

"But you will come to the Lodge," said Susan. It was an unfortunate remark, made only because it had suggested itself as something to be said

Poor Claude's firmness gave way. He rose and walked up and down the room; then came again to the sofa, and said, "I must go to-morrow; the funeral is to be there. I must wait to see the relations; then my connection with the Lodge, and Wingfield, and with all that part of the country will be at an end."

It was as though Susan's heart had been touched by ice, such a cold chill passed through her.

"Mrs. Graham has promised to write to me," he continued, more cheerfully; "and I hope she will let Charlie pay me a visit at Helmsley, some day."

"He will be very glad, I am sure," said Susan. Her voice was cold; Claude noticed it.

"I can never express what I feel," he said. "Whenever I try, I fail; but we have had such deep feelings in common, I don't think we can ever meet as strangers, however long our separation may be. I can answer for myself, at least—I shall never forget."

"Neither shall we," said Susan, and the words were spoken timidly, but the tone came from her heart.

"Shall it be a compact?" said Claude, and he offered her his hand. Susan placed hers within it, yet scarcely returned the cordial affectionate pressure.

"Thank you for allowing me to be your friend," he said.

"You have been so without my permission," she replied.

"Not as I could wish. Promise me you will tell me if in any way I can be of service to you."

"If you will promise the same."

"You might be; yes, I think you might," he exclaimed with an eager impulse; but a change followed instantaneously. "Yet it is too late; forgive me for disturbing you," and with another hasty pressure of the hand, he left her.

Mrs. Graham went into Susan's room late that night to

see if she was asleep. She had been sitting up herself talking for some time to Claude. And Susan knew this, for she had heard their voices in the room below hers, and knew when Claude said good night, and followed his step through the hall, and heard him shut the front door; and still fancied that she was listening to his footsteps beneath her window, but that was only imagination.

Her mother came in very quietly, but Susan spoke and inquired if it was late.

"Not very, my love; but I hoped you would have been asleep."

"I can't sleep, mamma; I think of so many things; I heard the voices down stairs," she added.

"Claude is but just gone. Poor fellow! he is so terribly lonely now, and I don't know what to do for him. I am afraid it will even be worse for him by and by than it is now."

"Mamma, you are tired and worn out, you are thinking of everyone but yourself," exclaimed Susan. "And yet you must be the most unhappy."

"I can keep up, my love, for the present, and there is no support like that of thinking for others. I must do that now. Can you tell me, Susan, anything about Helen and this reported engagement with Captain Mordaunt? Don't if it involves any breach of confidence."

"Helen!" repeated Susan, in a tone of surprise; "I don't know: she never tells me anything. Mamma, will Mr. Egerton travel with us to-morrow?"

"I think he will go later, though I can't bear his being left alone as he must be; and he distresses himself about Helen."

Mrs. Graham waited for a remark in reply, but it did not come.

She drew a chair to the side of the bed, and as she sat

down Susan threw her arms round her and kissed her, and murmured "My own, sweet mother!" She had no power to say more; and the touch of her parched lips sent a pang to her mother's heart.

"You had better sleep, my child," said Mrs. Graham; "we will talk of this to-morrow. I only wanted, if I could, to satisfy poor Claude. He is so sure that Helen is engaged."

"Will he care?" asked Susan, and her voice sounded changed and hollow.

"He thinks Captain Mordaunt unworthy of her, and he has proof of it. A gossiping letter from Madame Reinhard to the Baroness d'Olban has fallen into his hands, which corroborates some disagreeable reports he has heard at his Club. Captain Mordaunt has been making so sure of having Helen at any moment, that he has even laid bets upon the subject. If Helen knew this she would be intensely angry, but the difficulty is how to let her know it. If Lady Augusta is told, she will interfere just in the way to exasperate Helen, and induce her to marry Captain Mordaunt; if Sir Henry is told, he will give the affair into Lady Augusta's management. I don't see what is to be done; and if Helen is really engaged, the affair becomes very complicated and awkward."

"I—I——" Susan struggled for breath; her mother gave her some water, and raised her pillow, and in a trembling voice she said, "Helen was not engaged when I left her to-day." Turning her head aside she closed her eyes.

"Thank you for that shadow of comfort, at least, my darling," said Mrs. Graham; "I will let Claude know the first thing in the morning."

Susan's lips moved, but no sound came from them, and underneath the coverlid her hands were tightly clenched together with a pressure which at any other moment must have been real suffering.

Once more she felt her mother's kiss upon her forehead, and Mrs. Graham stood by her and looked at her anxiously, but she did not speak again. Sleep seemed to be stealing over her ; and at length, as minutes passed on and still she did not move, Mrs. Graham's uneasiness lessened, and she left her.

But sleep came not to Susan. Feverish, restless, a weight on her heart, tumultuous thoughts thronging her brain, a sense of sin on her conscience, where could the weary heart find rest ? Claude's anxiety for Helen—what mattered it to her ? Why did the mere sound of their names, when coupled together, strike her as with the sharp thrust of a dagger ? Why did the possibility of Helen's being actually engaged to Captain Mordaunt make the blood rush to her heart with a thrill of excitement, only to end in the depression of a wretchedness that seemed about to sink her to the earth ? What was it she felt, which she did not dare own even to her mother ? Susan groaned in bitterness of heart, and tried to pray, and felt her words checked by the consciousness of some unknown yet permitted evil ; and then, in very weariness, said that she would think no more, and strove to sleep and failed. So the hours of darkness passed, whilst the dim light burning in her room gave a new and fearful outline to every well-known object. Occasionally she started at the sudden cry of some reveller in the street, or shuddered as a faint moaning through the crevices of the old walls recalled the solemn hours of watching, and the last struggle of human life. And before the first glimmering of dawn stole through the closed shutters, she rose and went to the window, and sat there gazing into the vacant street, listening to the silence of the great city. The twilight dawn awoke, bringing with it a dead rumbling sound. Some heavy cart or wagon was setting forth on its long journey into the country, and rolled heavily along ; then a footstep was heard



on the pavement, whilst a passenger wended his way slowly and stealthily, as though fearful that some face from the closed and veiled windows would look forth to discover the business which drew him forth at that unwonted hour. At length the light of morning made its way through the murky haze which shut out the sky; and with it came lighter sounds of market-carts, and cabs driving up to their station; and passengers passed more frequently, and men stopped and greeted each other beneath the window. And when the great current of London life was once more flowing on in its full and wondrous vigour, Susan, utterly exhausted, crept to her bed, and fell asleep; the striking of the clock from the churches in the vicinity, mingling with her last waking thoughts, and seeming to echo in her ears, "Be kind to her, Claude; be kind."

She slept, and her dreams were troubled. She was in a vast church; crowds filled it, familiar forms glided in and out amongst the tall pillars, and before the altar stood Claude with Helen by his side—lovely in her bridal dress, yet with a look of trouble on her brow. And then it was all changed, and it was Susan herself who knelt by Claude, and felt his hand clasping hers, icy as though it had been with the touch of death; and again all was dark, confused, and a deep pit had opened before her, and Claude was leading her to the brink, and bidding her look in, for Helen lay there. She started, and awoke to hear her mother's sweet voice asking if she felt able to rise; and with the half-consciousness of those first waking moments, Susan clung to Mrs. Graham, and murmured, "Keep me, mamma; don't let me dream again. I am wicked in my dreams; keep me."

CHAPTER LXIII.

MRS. GRAHAM was to leave London at twelve; but Claude was to go down to the Lodge by a night train, make whatever arrangements might be needful there, and return to London the following day. He was at Cavendish Square in time for breakfast. Susan was down stairs. There was no agitation now; nothing but that composed self-possession which might have been called stoicism. Neither did she seem ill or over tired, her usual powers of judging and acting for every one seemed restored to her; and even her mother forgot to remind her not to do too much.

Claude talked to her a good deal, and consulted her. No allusion was made to anything but immediate questions of business, not even to the grief which every one shared. The world's necessities had for the hour closed upon all that deep underlying sorrow, a strong power kept it down; only now and then one might be seen to steal apart from the rest, and stand in silent thought, or perhaps dash away a rising tear, but no one dared give way.

"Half-past eleven!" said Mrs. Graham, taking out her watch, and then glancing round the deserted rooms.

"The carriage is just come," said Claude. "You will have plenty of time."

"Isabella is late as usual," said Mrs. Graham. "Susan, my love, go and call her, will you?"

Susan went, and returned with a report that Isabella was in distress about her desk and portfolio; she could not find room for them.

"And her trunk is not fastened then?" said Mrs. Graham, looking very vexed. "We shall certainly be late. She must come and leave it."

But Susan brought back another message. Isabella did not like to leave her treasures to any care but her own. If she might be allowed to wait and see her trunk corded, and follow in the cab, it would be all right. She and Martha might go together.

"I can't allow that. Isabella must come with me, and Martha will see to everything," said Mrs. Graham.

"Martha will be sure to be late, if she is left alone," said Anna.

"Let me stay, mamma," said Susan. "You can trust me to be in time; and Barnes will help me in anything there may be to be done, and he will come with us to the station. We shall be there nearly as soon as you."

Mrs. Graham looked very doubtful.

"It is the best plan," said Claude. "Miss Graham, I know, is always punctual; and we shall have time to get the tickets, and see to the rest of the luggage, if we start at once."

"I don't like leaving Susan; she is not well enough to have anything to do," said Mrs. Graham.

Claude looked up quickly. "Not well? I am so very sorry. Are you really not well?"

"Quite, thank you," said Susan, shortly. "Mamma, indeed you must consent."

"You and Isabella—I don't like it," was the reply.

"And Barnes, dearest mother. You will see us following you before you have turned the corner." Susan put her mother's shawl round her, and gave her her carriage bag.

Barnes came in to hasten them. The carriage was packed, and they had no time to lose.

"And there is the cab ready, too," said Anna. "Never mind Isabella's fidgets, Susan. She must carry her desk in her hand."

Mrs. Graham went into the hall. She could not bear to be seen as she said good-bye to the servants.

Claude turned to Susan. "It troubles me to think you are ill; you must give yourself rest when you reach home."

Susan tried to speak and smile, but tears came instead. He held her hand so kindly, almost tenderly; it seemed as though he longed to give way to some pent-up feelings. And then he tore himself from her; and she watched him as he handed her mother and Anna into the carriage, and turned back to the dark room, and felt as though it were flooded with sunshine.

The carriage drove off, and Susan went up stairs. The trunk was still open, the housemaid and Isabella were vainly trying to close it. Isabella was nearly crying; her spirits often gave way under pressure. She yielded at once, however, to Susan, who insisted that the trunk should be fastened directly, and the writing-desk left as a separate parcel. But then the key of the trunk was missing; and some little time was spent in searching for it; and when it was found and the box corded, and carried down stairs, the blotting book, as well as the writing-desk, was seen lying on the table. That completely overcame Isabella, she could not imagine what to do with it; and her mamma disliked having so many parcels. She might have remained pondering the difficulty for many precious minutes, but that Susan quietly decided the point, by taking the unfortunate cause of offence under her own charge. Barnes was visibly impatient, and gave his directions in a loud voice to the cabman, to drive as fast as he could, and take the shortest way. The latter injunction was unfortunate; the shortest way was through a crowded thoroughfare, and a heavy dray and an omnibus blocked up the passage. Barnes scolded; the cabman shouted; the omnibus driver returned a volley of abuse. When at last the cab emerged from the scene of confusion, Susan looked at her watch, but made no remark.

"Just in time, I declare," said Isabella, as they stood

upon the platform of the railway station; "and there is mamma, in that farthest carriage!" They hurried down the line.

"It moves," exclaimed Susan.

"Just off, ma'am," said a railway porter at her side. And the train rushed away.

Isabella uttered a faint scream. Susan stood for a moment confounded, and then said: "Mamma saw us, so she won't be anxious; we must go by the next train;" and she walked towards the waiting-room.

"I am very sorry. I am afraid it is my fault," began Isabella, in an exculpatory tone; "but we should have been quite in time, if it had not been for that dreadful omnibus, and the dray. What will mamma say? And look, there is Mr. Egerton."

Susan stopped involuntarily.

"I don't want him to see us," said Isabella; and Susan moved on a few steps, but slowly.

Claude was looking for them. He came up, seeming much more vexed than Susan, and complaining of the cabman.

"It is my fault," said Isabella, humbly.

"It is every one's fault, and no one's," observed Susan. "There is no good in thinking about it. We can wait here, very well, for the next train," she added, addressing Claude.

"Yes; but I don't like your travelling alone. I wish—if I had only known it before, I could have managed to go with you."

"Two ladies can't come to any harm," said Susan. "I don't like to feel so dependent."

"No, you like to be useful always. I know that. If you are going to the waiting-room, you must let me get you some luncheon first."

"We had some biscuits before we came away," said Isabella. "I don't think we want anything more."

"And your luggage?"

"Barnes has taken care of it. He will be here again in time for the next train."

They stopped at the door of the waiting-room.

"I won't trust to Barnes; I will come back for you myself, before the train starts," said Claude.

Isabella's arm was within that of her sister's, and some sudden movement made her look at Susan, and ask if she was tired.

"Only a little; we had better go in and sit down." She turned to Claude: "Thank you very much for looking after us, but don't trouble yourself to come again. Barnes will do very well."

Claude smiled. "I shall trouble myself. Four o'clock, I think. Good-bye till then;" and he walked away.

Isabella made Susan lie down on one of the sofas; the room was empty, and the quietness was a luxury. Susan closed her eyes, and Isabella took out a book, thinking, perhaps, she would fall asleep. But if she did, it was only for a moment, and she started up almost immediately, asking if it was time to move, and glancing at the door eagerly, as though expecting some one to enter. Isabella laughed at her, and begged her to lie down again; but Susan refused, and said she would write a note;—she had not said good-bye to Helen,—there had not been time, and it would seem unkind to leave London without a word. "I may use your writing things, I suppose?" she added.

Isabella nodded assent, and went on reading. It was a long time before she looked up again. When she did, it was in consequence of a sound of rather quick, nervous breathing. Several people were in the room now; she did not know from whence it came.

"The lady is not very well, ma'am, I think," said a respectable-looking woman, apparently a nurse, who was stand-

ing near the table with a child in her arms. She handed a bottle of salts to Susan, whose face was very pale. Susan did not see it, she beckoned to Isabella,—a folded paper was in her hand. "Whose is this? How did you come by it?" she asked, anxiously, but quite quietly.

"What? I don't understand." Isabella took the paper from her.

"I found it in the blotting-book accidentally," said Susan; "I thought it belonged to myself,—I did not read it all through. Isabella, what does it mean,—is it yours?"

Isabella rapidly glanced at it, and a look of extreme perplexity came over her face, followed by an expression of sudden recollection. "Oh! I remember,—yes,—there is no mystery, only I have been careless. Mamma or Mr. Egerton must have left it in the dressing-room, the day before yesterday. I put it away, and forgot it. What makes you look so strange, Susan?"

"Do I look strange?" Susan tried to smile.

"Yes, is it about the letter? it seems a very odd one."

"Mr. Egerton left it, did he?" asked Susan.

"He may have done it, or mamma, I can't say. I saw there was something in it about Helen."

Susan kept the letter in her hand, but without looking at it. "I remember now," continued Isabella, "that Mr. Egerton came back into the dressing-room, and carried away an envelope from amongst the papers near my writing-desk,—this must have belonged to it."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Isabella returned to her book, Susan took up a pen, wrote a few words, and laid it down again. The room was becoming crowded, for another train was going off. Isabella's attention was drawn away from her sister. She did not see—no one saw or noticed—the change in Susan's countenance,—the look of intense thought, of indecision, then of

sudden resolution, and again of doubt. Susan's mind was a chaos, her judgment seemed to have failed her.

The paper—she knew well what it was. It was the letter to which her mother had referred,—which would prove Madame Reinhard to be insincere, and Captain Mordaunt unworthy. And it was needful, above all things, that Helen should have it at once; the delay of an hour might, so Susan believed, be of consequence. But there was no one to take it or send it, no one who would venture to interfere.

Only Susan herself. The pulsation of her heart stopped for an instant, as the thought occurred to her, and then it went on with sickening rapidity. All the difficulties, doubts, questionings, attendant upon such a step, thronged upon her; she had not time to disentangle and combat with them separately. Minutes were hurrying on; if she waited, it would be impossible to go to Helen,—and without seeing her, interference might be useless.

Yet Susan could not resolve at once. She had little doubt of her mother's approval, of Claude's gratitude. Her cousin loved and trusted, and would listen to her. A few words from her, and with such proof before her, Helen would be safe and free. But it was the suggestion of the tempter which whispered, that Helen's freedom might be her own misery. A terrified sense of weakness for one moment overpowered her, the next she went up to her sister.

"Isabella, I have something very much on my mind to say to Helen; I can't write it; I must see her. You will be quite safe in remaining here, and I shall be back long before the train starts."

Isabella gazed at her in amazement. "Going to Grosvenor Place by yourself! Susan, you are mad!"

"Hush! hush! don't keep me, I must go. Minutes are precious. Stay here and read." Susan attempted to smile. "Don't look at me in that strange way. I know what I am doing."



"But I will go with you; I can't let you go alone." Isabella fastened the strings of her bonnet.

Susan laid her hand quietly upon Isabella's arm; all excitement of manner was gone, as she said: "I am doing what mamma would wish, and I am going alone. If Mr. Egerton should come, tell him—no, don't say where I am gone, only that I had thought of something which I was obliged to do."

Almost before Isabella could find words to continue her expostulation, Susan had sent a porter for a cab, and was on her way to Grosvenor Place.



## CHAPTER LXIV.

THAT afternoon Lady Augusta Clare sat at work finishing her altar-carpet. A very complacent, satisfied smile was on her lips. She looked at her stitches affectionately, every now and then held them at a little distance to admire their regularity, whilst occasionally she turned the pages of a volume of Thomas-à-Kempis, red-lined, and bound massively, which lay open before her.

Whether Lady Augusta's unwonted softness and serenity were to be attributed to the altar-carpet or the devotional book, might have been doubtful. Unkind judges probably would have said that they were due to neither, for certainly, when the door opened, and Helen came in, Lady Augusta's first words might have suggested that something rather more worldly was at the root of her good humour.

"My dear love, I have been longing to see you this morning. But you have been too happy, I suppose, to think of me. Is dear Constantine gone?"

"Captain Mordaunt is talking to papa in the study, I believe," said Helen.

Her tone betrayed no feeling of any kind, neither did her countenance.

"I hope I shall see him before he goes," said Lady Augusta; "I have some plans in my head, which will please you, my darling."

"Thank you," said Helen; "I dare say they will do very well."

'More than that, I trust. Of course your father and I wish to further your happiness in every way. You can never enjoy yourself younger."

"Never," said Helen, a little sarcastically.

"And you would like a continental tour so much," continued Lady Augusta. "We are quite bent upon your going abroad after your wedding, and we talk of following you."

Helen could with difficulty repress an exclamation of disagreeable surprise; but she managed to say that it might be a good arrangement.

"It will give us the opportunity of meeting you again sooner than we otherwise should," continued Lady Augusta; "and we shall long to do that. Maurice, too, may be able to accompany us, if we wait till the end of the season. I feel sure it will add to dear Constantine's pleasure to have him with him."

Helen was silent.

"I long to let your aunt know of your happiness," pursued Lady Augusta. "She will feel it even in the midst of her grief for the dear old Admiral. Ah! how quickly he has been taken from us! It does not do to set our hearts upon anything in this world;" and Lady Augusta worked two stitches in her carpet, as a comment upon her words.

"They are to leave London to-day," said Helen, shortly.

"So I understand. Poor Claude, no doubt, has to make

all the arrangements. By-the-by, my love, I congratulate you now upon all awkwardness being over between you and him. You will meet quite upon a comfortable footing."

"Quite," said Helen. She turned away to the window, and, without looking at Lady Augusta again, said, "I have engaged to go to Richmond this afternoon; Madame Reinhard will be with me, and Captain Mordaunt will drive us."

A transient cloud of surprise came over Lady Augusta's face at this determined assertion of an independent will; but she replied most amiably,—“Just as you like, my love. Under the circumstances, you will, I know, wish to be as much as possible with dear Constantine.”

“And to-morrow we go to the horticultural fête,” continued Helen.

“Certainly, my love, if you wish it.”

“And perhaps to the Duchess of Monteith's *soirées* afterwards,” added Helen.

“Quite dissipated!” said Lady Augusta, in her sweetest tone. “And such a change!” she added, in an under voice, though loud enough for Helen to hear; “but love works wonders. Did dear Constantine tell you how the Earl was to-day, my love?”

“He says he is better,” said Helen, bluntly. “The doctors declare he may live years yet.”

“One can scarcely wish it,” said Lady Augusta, sighing;—“such a suffering life as he has,—and so well prepared;—one can't help feeling it would be a happy release.”

“He is not such an old man,” replied Helen. “He is fifteen years younger than the Admiral.”

“Constitution makes all the difference,” said Lady Augusta; “his has been broken for years. But, speaking of the Admiral, have you had any message or note from Susan to-day?”

“I had a few lines from my aunt last night,” said Helen,

—"just wishing me good-bye. Susan, she said, was not well enough to write."

Lady Augusta looked as though she expected to see the note; but Helen made no offer of showing it.

"Susan will feel the Admiral's loss severely," said Lady Augusta, "unless —— has it struck you lately, Helen, that she and poor Claude have been very much together?"

"I don't know anything about them," was Helen's answer; and she moved away from the window, and walked out of the room, slowly, till the door was closed, and then rushed up the stairs to her own apartment, turned the bolt violently, and paced her chamber in a storm of indignation.

She had no doubt as to the wisdom of her decision now. Live with Lady Augusta! It would be better a thousand times to marry Captain Mordaunt. Penances! purgatory! were nothing to this moral torture. Such utter ignorance of her feelings!—such a betrayal of double motives!—hypocrisy—worldliness! Another such conversation, and she would be driven frantic. And Helen, in her excited sensitiveness, walked up and down, believing herself a martyr, and stifling any uneasy suggestions of conscience as to her own great offences, by the angry consideration of Lady Augusta's want of tact and good feeling.

Annette knocked at the door twice without being heard; the third time she was answered by a harsh, "Come in;" and, when she entered, stood for a moment, afraid to speak.

That was often the case now: the bright and affectionate Helen Clare was grievously changed of late. Few dared to interrupt or intrude upon her unsummoned.

"Miss Graham in the drawing-room, Mademoiselle," said Annette, whilst she glanced doubtfully at Helen.

Helen turned to her sharply. "Miss Graham! You are mistaken; she has left London."

"*Pardon*, Mademoiselle! she is wishing to speak to you;

she begs to come to your own room; she has no time to spare."

"Neither have I," murmured Helen: yet she went up to the glass, gazed at her own lovely yet haggard face, strove to look calm and unruffled, and again said, "she may come."

Annette drew near cautiously. "Captain Mordaunt, he saw me in the corridor; he gave me this little note, Mademoiselle. He returns at three o'clock."

Helen would not take the note, and Annette laid it on the table. It was unopened until Susan was heard coming on the stairs; then it was read through hastily, and thrown aside. Helen received such little notes now at all hours of the day; it was Captain Mordaunt's fashion of showing his tenderness.

A gentle tap at the door, very unlike Annette's quick demand for admission, was heard by Helen directly. Susan came in, without haste or agitation,—without even saying that she had but a few minutes to spare. There was that in her countenance which told of a will which held in check every feeling of womanish nervousness or weakness,—a self-control so great, that it acted, as if by magic, upon Helen; and the cousins kissed each other silently and tenderly; and Susan said in her slow, measured voice, "I have come to you suddenly, dear Helen; but I was not able to write. We leave London at four, and I had something to say to you before we go."

"Anything serious? of consequence?" exclaimed Helen, whilst the excitable spirit flashed in her quick, dark eyes.

A momentary pause. Then Susan said, "Helen, are you engaged to Captain Mordaunt?"

She asked the question so quietly, that Helen could not help answering it in the same tone. "Yes."

A momentary feeling, difficult to interpret, might have been seen on Susan's face. She sat in silent thought.

"You don't like it," said Helen.

"I wish that you did not," replied Susan.

"It is freedom," said Helen. "Susan, you won't despise me?" and she leaned her head upon her cousin's shoulder, and gave way to a flood of bitter tears.

Susan allowed the tears to flow for some moments; and Helen started up suddenly, and one of those brilliant smiles which formed the peculiar beauty of her face flashed across it; but it ended in withering sarcasm, as she murmured, "I do what others do; it is all a lottery."

"It is certainly, in some cases," said Susan. "Helen, if you were not engaged, I would kneel to you, to beg you to pause."

Susan's words were earnest, but her tone was not. Helen smiled, as she said, "You are come to reason with me from duty."

"Yes, from duty," repeated Susan, abstractedly.

"And I must not listen to you from duty," said Helen.

"It is too late."

Susan was silent.

"We will talk of something else," said Helen. "Tell me about your mother."

Susan's hand shook as she opened her carriage bag. Instead of replying to Helen's question, she put a paper into her hands.

"I don't understand; you frighten me," said Helen, scarcely looking at it.

"Will you read it?" Susan walked to the further end of the room, and stood before a book-case; but she sat down again soon, for her knees trembled.

She did not look towards Helen, till a hand was pressed upon her shoulder, and a hollow voice said, with a harsh attempt at a laugh, "This is an absurdity. Whose is it?"

"Madame Reinhard's," said Susan; "you see her signa-

ture; you know the handwriting. It is addressed, as you perceive, to the Baroness d'Olban."

Helen tossed it from her, scornfully. "Madame Reinhard does not know the Baroness!" Yet she took up the letter again, and speaking through her closed lips, said, "it is a good imitation; a clever device also. So it is said that Captain Mordaunt has done me the honour to make me the subject of his bets. I thank you, Susan, much, for your information, but the matter will easily be set at rest. Captain Mordaunt will soon discover the writer; only do me the favour to tell me how the precious document came into your possession."

"It was found by me accidentally," said Susan; "but it was ——" she stopped, and her voice trembled. "Helen, I believe Mr. Egerton knows more of it than I do."

"Claude!" exclaimed Helen, indignantly. "Claude land himself to a plot!" Her eyes flashed. "Susan, if he were to tell me so himself, I would not believe it."

"No stratagem, dearest Helen," said Susan; and as she touched her cousin's arm kindly, her hand was shaken off impatiently. "How can it be one? and why should Mr. Egerton wish to interfere?" She spoke the last words doubtfully.

"Yes, why should he wish?" repeated Helen, in a tone of unutterable mournfulness, which touched a chord of keen self-reproach in Susan's heart. She went on eagerly: "You were right in coming, Susan; it shall be found out. Don't think me ungrateful; it shall be found out."

"But there is nothing to find," said Susan, quietly. "It is true."

Helen laughed satirically. "True, that Madame Reinhard has deceived me; has told falsehoods? I would sooner believe that the sun had ceased to shine in the heavens; she does not know the Baroness. And for Captain Mordaunt,—

"whatever you may think of him," and Helen drew  
 up proudly, "he is a gentleman."

Then let him act like one," exclaimed Susan. "Helen,  
 listen to me but for one moment; I have so few to  
 . It is true, all true; they have been playing with  
 you have thrown yourself away; you must be wretched.  
 there is still time. Oh, listen, listen! Claude says it;  
 he cares about it." Susan's tone grew sharper, more  
 urgent; the words seemed forced from her as she uttered  
 and still, whilst Helen averted her face, she repeated,  
 "Claude knows all; Claude would give worlds to save you."  
 Helen turned her ghastly countenance towards her cou-  
 "It must not be true; Susan,—I have promised."

But draw back."

And he stamped by the world a second time as a jilt,"  
 injured Helen; and she covered her face with her hands.  
 rising up again the next moment, she added, eagerly,  
 "it is not true; there is falsehood on the face of it."  
 Inquire," said Susan. "Madame Reinhard will tell

And will know that I suspect her of untruth," said  
 1. "It can't be. Susan, you mean kindly. Yet see  
 I think." She was about to tear the letter in pieces,  
 Susan caught it from her.

Think what you will, Helen; but you have no right to  
 at. Follow your fate, if you choose."

Not if I choose," exclaimed Helen, interrupting her,—  
 "must."

Her mocking laugh thrilled upon Susan's ears with a  
 of terror. She seized Helen's hand, and her tone was  
 solemn in its earnestness.

Helen, I should not dare to speak, if I were not sure  
 Captain Mordaunt is unworthy,—quite sure. Claude  
 not be mistaken, and he is so anxious, so miserable.



Only inquire; ask, for his sake," she added, in a changed and hollow voice.

Helen murmured to herself, "Not for his sake," and Susan's heart bounded, as though the weight of worlds had been removed from it.

"You think me weak and blind," continued Helen, firmly. "I am neither. What I have chosen to do I have done with my eyes open. For this miserable document, I neither know, nor wish to know, what it means. It is sufficient evidence against it that it professes to be written by Madame Reinhard to the Baroness d'Olban, and that its tone shows this to be an impossibility. I choose to trust my friends, and I will inquire no further."

Susan walked towards the door, but returned suddenly. "I heard Madame Reinhard's voice in the hall, as I came up the stairs. If you don't choose to ask her yourself if the letter is hers, you can have no objection to my asking."

"I have; I do object," exclaimed Helen, vehemently. "The letter is a disgrace, a libel. I don't believe it. I won't allow Madame Reinhard to be insulted. Susan, in this house, you would not dare do it."

"I would dare do any thing that should open your eyes," replied Susan. "Helen, you are afraid."

The burning colour rushed to Helen's cheek, then faded away, and left them colourless. She made no answer.

Susan put her hand upon the bell. "Annette will ask Madame Reinhard to come to us."

Helen sat down, clenching tightly the arm of her chair.

"Madame Reinhard is in the study," said Susan, as Annette appeared at the door. "Ask her if she will have the goodness to come to Miss Clare's room."

"It is your doing," said Helen reproachfully.

"Mine entirely. We need not shrink from truth!" Yet Susan, while she said the words, leaned against the wall for support.

"*Mein armes Kind!* you are ill then," was Madame Reinhard's exclamation, as she rushed into the room, and threw her arms round Helen. "Why did you not send me word before? why keep me from you?"

"It was I who sent the message," said Susan, coming forward.

Madame Reinhard started. "Ah! Miss Graham! So surprised I am; so little expecting the honour, the pleasure. But my sweet Helen, she is quite ill, surely?"

Helen looked up at her, smiled, but did not speak. Madame Reinhard appealed to Susan for an explanation.

"Helen has been fretted this morning," said Susan, and unconsciously there was a slight bitterness in her tone.

"Ah! yes, there are many things to fret one. This is a very discomfortable world. *Meine Liebe*, what shall I do for you?"

"Helen will be quite satisfied if you will only tell her whether this letter is yours," said Susan; and in an instant she placed the letter before Madame Reinhard and looked at her steadily.

"Mine! my letter! Miss Graham!" Madame Reinhard took the letter from Susan's hand, and there was a visible change in her countenance.

"It is yours, I believe," said Susan; and Helen raised her eyes to Madame Reinhard, and as she waited for a reply, withdrew from the caressing arm which was laid upon her neck.

Madame Reinhard laughed. "*Mein liebes Herz!* and you care for the nonsense, the joke! Too silly."

"Is it yours?" said Helen, in a faltering voice.

"What can it signify? and how did you have it?" Madame Reinhard became indignant as she addressed Susan. "So unladylike! so low! so mean!"

"What I am is nothing to the present purpose," replied Susan quietly. "I think, Helen, your question is answered."

"No! it is not answered," exclaimed Madame Reinhard. "I will proclaim to the world, I will let it be known what Miss Graham is. *Ma pauvre petite!*" Again she would have caressed Helen, but there was the same steady repulsion; Helen did not even look at her.

"It shall be a public disgrace, a dishonour," continued Madame Reinhard, passionately; "for myself, what care I? and, changing her tone, she tried to laugh. "You ask me about the letter. Suppose it to be mine. Suppose I write to a friend about things near my heart, and all but settle. Suppose I repeat the nonsense I have heard?"

"Nonsense!" said Helen, and the tone of her voice for a moment silenced Madame Reinhard.

"It is scarcely nonsense," continued Susan, "to repeat to a person like the Baroness d'Olban the things you have heard from Helen in strict confidence; still less can it be nonsense to tell them to Captain Mordaunt, and to encourage him to make a bet publicly that, with your help, Helen Clare shall consent to be his wife, willing or not willing, before another week has passed."

Helen involuntarily shuddered, and Susan stooped and kissed her forehead.

"The Baroness d'Olban spoken of in that way!" exclaimed Madame Reinhard. "Miss Graham, you will answer for your words."

"You spoke of her yourself," said Helen, in a faint voice. "You told me that you were scarcely acquainted with her."

"At first, of course; one is but a slight acquaintance at first; and I did hear things: it follows not they are true. *Meine Liebe*, it must not be that you judge me so. Let me talk to you by myself." She glanced impatiently at Susan.

"I shall keep you but a very few minutes," said Susan. "Helen, Madame Reinhard deceives you. She has long been the intimate friend of the Baroness d'Olban. I could prove

that without the help of the letter. A person whom we both depend upon knows it."

"A person! hear her, Helen," exclaimed Madame Reinhard. "I will tell you all. Do I not see it as if it were written before me? She leagues with that Mr. Egerton; she spies upon you and upon me. He has been at my house; he knows my friends; it is his scheme. He does not forgive, and he would revenge; he would not see you happy."

Susan smiled coldly. "Helen, dearest," she said, "you are convinced." But Helen could not speak; only bitter, scalding tears coursed each other down her cheeks.

"Monsieur le Capitaine will have Mr. Egerton answer for this," said Madame Reinhard.

Helen clasped her hands together in terror.

Susan whispered to her, "An idle threat! Now or never you must have courage." She spoke aloud to Madame Reinhard, "You have brought in Mr. Egerton's name unjustifiably. It is I who am answerable for this, and I only. Helen, before I go, promise me that this miserable engagement shall be put an end to."

"And take the consequences," exclaimed Madame Reinhard. "Let Mr. Egerton meet Captain Mordaunt if he dare."

Susan held her cousin's trembling hand. "Helen, darling, trust me, the blame is mine, only save yourself."

"She deceived me," murmured Helen.

"And Captain Mordaunt," said Susan; "what of him?"

The contraction of Helen's brow showed the feeling which his name aroused.

"Twice a jilt," said Madame Reinhard, sarcastically. "I know your English word."

Helen started from her seat. "Who dares call me that?" But she sank down again and murmured, "It will be true."

"It will not be true!" exclaimed Susan. "You were deceived by false appearances, and you have a full right to draw back."

"And Sir Henry and Miladi Augusta; and the kind world?" said Madame Reinhard, coolly.

"Mamma!" murmured Helen. "Susan, I dare not."

"Dare not be honest! Oh, Helen, how low have you sunk!"

Helen groaned in bitterness of spirit.

Madame Reinhard put her arm round her; but Helen drew herself away as from the touch of a serpent.

Susan looked at her watch. "There are but a few minutes more: come with me now, Helen, to Lady Augusta. Let the world blame you; and grant that it may have cause for blame, yet you will have some always to love and care for you,—my mother, myself, Claude——"

"Not him! not him!" murmured Helen.

"Yes, Claude," repeated Susan; and the unselfish nobleness of her nature gave force to the words which jarred upon the very tenderest chord of her own heart. "He has never ceased to be your friend. It is not in his nature to forget."

"Only to be comforted," observed Madame Reinhard, bitterly. "You see, *meine Liebe*, it is as I said; Miss Graham and Mr. Egerton, they are one."

"Was not that a carriage which stopped?" exclaimed Helen. She rushed to the window. "Mamma is going out. I can't see her."

Susan, instead of replying, drew her gently to the door.

"I congratulate you," said Madame Reinhard.

Helen turned to her with sudden composure: "You may congratulate me," she said. "Whatever may be the end, Madame Reinhard, at least, will never again have the opportunity of deceiving me."

She followed Susan down the stairs, and paused at the

entrance of Lady Augusta's boudoir. "Let me go in alone; wait for me in the drawing-room."

Susan whispered, "God help you, dearest!" and Helen opened the door.

But the room was empty. She hurried again into the passage. Susan was in the drawing-room, and Helen joined her there. In that interval Lady Augusta passed down the staircase, and the rattle of the carriage wheels was the announcement that she had driven off.

Helen looked at her cousin with a face of utter despair. "You see," she said, "it is all against me."

"Never! never! Helen; it will save you from a life-long repentance."

"If you could only stay with me," murmured Helen.

"Impossible! I have not even now three minutes. Only promise that it shall be done."

Helen trembled as she said, "I promise."

And Susan kissed her tenderly, and whispered again, "God help you!" And in another minute she was driving through the streets, amid the whirl of business and pleasure, with one thought in her heart, that she had saved Helen for the present, and that the future lay with God.

Helen had but a short private interview with Lady Augusta that evening, very much shorter than she had anticipated. Lady Augusta came home from her drive full of excitement. She had been making a round of visits, announcing to her friends dear Helen's approaching marriage with Constantine Mordaunt, so soon to be Earl of Harford. She had received congratulations, heard from all quarters that she was the best, wisest, kindest of step-mothers, and had owned that she was at the summit of her expectations. Something perhaps in the unusual flow of spirits which the circumstances occasioned, and the heat of the weather, which happened to be great, brought on a violent headache; but she

would not yield to it. When her maid came to dress her for dinner, she insisted upon seeing Helen, and talking with her about her wedding dress. Helen went to her as a culprit. Lady Augusta's first question was, "How did you enjoy your drive to Richmond?"

"I did not go, mamma," was the reply. The tone and manner were very peculiar.

Lady Augusta turned round sharply, and curiously. "You did not go, Helen? And Madame Reinhard, and Constantine?"

"They may have gone; I can't say."

Helen had not the least intention of being aggravating; she was too much afraid of the task before her willingly to increase the irritation which she discovered in Lady Augusta's manner. But her very timidity was her danger.

"I don't understand; you are playing with me, Helen."

"Not playing at all, mamma, only in very serious earnest." Helen's voice softened, and there was something beseeching in her accent.

Lady Augusta raised her hand to her head. Helen saw that her face was flushed, and there was an expression in her eyes which was unusual. She begged her to sit down, and offered her some eau de Cologne, and Lady Augusta bathed her temples, and owned she felt strange and ill; but she persisted in her inquiry. Helen tried to evade it; and the evasion increased Lady Augusta's agitation. It seemed as though the secret misgiving lurked in her mind, ready to break forth at any moment.

"I have been thinking about your wedding dress," she said.

"Have you, mamma? I am sorry you should have given yourself the trouble."

"Why call it trouble? What do you mean?" Lady Augusta's tone was fierce, and again she pressed her hand upon her brow.

"We won't talk about it just at present," said Helen, for she felt frightened.

"But we must talk about it ; there is something hidden,—I will know. Helen!"—the suspicion burst forth,—  
"you would not dare play false a second time?"

Helen trembled violently. She said in a faltering voice, "I will explain what I feel another time, but I think Captain Mordaunt has not treated me quite as he ought."

Lady Augusta gazed upon her wonderingly and incredulously. "Changed since this afternoon ! changed ! changed !" she repeated.

"Only from things I have heard," said Helen, speaking very gently. "They must be inquired into. But not now, mamma, not now ; you are ill. I am sure you are," she added, taking Lady Augusta's hand.

"I am not ill ; I am well." Lady Augusta caught her hand away, and stood up ; her face was crimson. "Helen, you have been my torment from your infancy."

Helen was proudly silent.

"Yes," continued Lady Augusta, "you have thwarted me in everything—all my wishes have been disappointed. You have made yourself a mark for the world ; every one points at me because of your conduct. But it shall not be again"—the tones of her voice became louder. "You shall promise me that you will never treat Constantine Mordaunt as you did Claude Egerton."

She waited for a reply, her eyes riveted, and her figure immovable. If it had been an hour before Helen answered, it seemed that she would still have remained in the same fixed attitude.

"I cannot promise, mamma. I can prove to you that Captain Mordaunt is ——" But Helen dared not finish her sentence, for Lady Augusta sank into a chair, her face working with convulsive agitation. Helen drew near, but



she was motioned away. Lady Augusta's countenance expressed the most racking pain and mental excitement.

Helen, now excessively alarmed, touched the bell, but Lady Augusta started forward to prevent her. The exertion was followed by reaction, and she fell back in a kind of stupor.

A telegraphic message that evening carried the intelligence to Wingfield, that Lady Augusta Clara was attacked with brain fever, and that her life was in danger.

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## CHAPTER LXV.

Among the many scenes upon which the eye of the traveller rests, as he wanders through foreign lands, there are perhaps only a few which imprint themselves indelibly on the memory. The greater part fade both in colouring and in the distinctness of their outline, as years go by. The general impression—the soul, if it may be so called—leaves its trace; we feel what we have looked upon, but we cannot recall it. Yet some recollections there are upon which the hand of time seems to have no power. The current of life bears us rapidly away, and its cares call our attention aside, and give us no leisure for imagination; but the beauty once gazed upon, has become “a joy for ever.” Still it appears before us, unlooked for, unsummoned; still it paints itself to our fancy in the heaped-up masses of the stormy clouds, and the vivid colouring of the sunset sky; and even as it rises there follows the intense, eager, longing to look upon it once more, which would seem to belong only to the love called forth by a living being, the yearning for the absent and the dead.

There is a narrow pass between the mountains which separate the southern Tyrol from the Austrian province of Venice.

Some fifty years ago, it was probably traversed by few but the people of the country. Now, a road, broad and smooth, passes along the base of the mighty hills, and tracks the course of the little river Rienz, leading by a continuous but gradual ascent from the Pusterthal to the vale of Ampezzo. Along this road, the English traveller rolls in his easy carriage, troops of soldiers march on their way to the Austrian provinces, and the stream of commercial traffic passes from Bavaria and the Tyrol to the seaports of Trieste and Venice.

Yet the Ampezzo pass can never be anything but solitary—solitary in spirit. The jagged peaks of the dolomite mountains stand apart, holding no communion with the pettiness of human interests. They point their spiral summits, sharp as gigantic needles, to the sky; and the gloomy cliffs which form their base stand proudly inaccessible to the foot of man. Wonderful indeed they are both in form and colouring: in parts black, as though some huge hand had stained their rugged precipices with pitch; in parts tinged with a pale yellow, and again exhibiting a surface of deep, bright red. Peak above peak they rise; their keen heads looking down upon the solemn pine forests which clothe their sides; whilst behind, peering over all, may be seen a far distant summit, steeped, glowing, fused in the light which is neither of Heaven nor of earth, but which mingles the glories of each, the hue of sunset upon snow.

Such at least was the appearance of the mountains as a party of English travellers, on their way from Inspruck to Venice, journeyed through the Ampezzo pass, late in an evening towards the close of summer. An elderly lady, thin and haggard, and propped up by cushions, and evidently wearied

by the distance which she had already travelled, leaned back in the luxurious carriage, with her eyes closed; or, if she opened them, casting a vacant glance around her, as though she did not understand why she should be there, and inquiring how much farther they must go before they stopped for the night.

By her side sat a young girl, pale and worn likewise, so worn indeed, that at the first glance the perfect outline of her very lovely features would scarcely have attracted remark. But bodily fatigue seemed to have no power over her, as bending from the carriage, she gazed intently upon the rocks, every now and then uttering some ejaculation of wonder and delight, and the next moment turning to the invalid with a word of apology or thoughtfulness, arranging the pillows, and suggesting, "We shall be there very soon now! Pietro says so."

The back seat of the carriage was occupied by a tall, grey-haired gentleman, busied with Murray's Handbook; and another lady, young, with no marked beauty, nothing striking in figure or manner, unless it might be an air of thoughtful self-control and repose. She too was engrossed by the scenery, but it was in a different way from her companion. There were no expressions of ecstasy; she sat quite still, and it seemed an effort to her to speak; but there was a mist over her dark grey eyes, and occasionally she laid her hand gently upon that of her friend, and when their glances met, she smiled, and the smile was as a sunbeam of gladness lighting up some quiet home valley.

"Cortina d'Ampezzo, that was the place, wasn't it, Susan?" said the gentleman, pointing to the name in the Handbook. "Stella d'Oro, clean and honest,—one must look out for both those points now: these people are not so unsophisticated as our friends in the Tyrol."

"Lady Augusta will like the Italian cookery, I hope,"

said Susan; "that is one great fault in the Tyrol; one can't afford to have a fastidious appetite."

Lady Augusta roused herself. "Are we getting to the end, Sir Henry? I don't see any houses."

No one smiled; but Helen answered directly, "We are very near the top of the pass; and there Pietro will move on faster; and papa says it is a very good inn."

"Murray says so, not I," said Sir Henry; "what he calls good may be straw beds and sour bread."

"It is very hard," murmured Lady Augusta; "we would pay for every thing; we don't care what we pay Pietro manages very badly; we ought to turn him away."

"Pietro is only the *voiturier*, my dear," said Sir Henry. "He does well enough what he professes; he can't answer for the inns."

Lady Augusta looked to Helen as if for protection. There was an expression of helplessness in her marked, hard features which was very sad.

"Annette will manage very comfortably for us," said Helen. "She has been abroad so much, she knows exactly what to do. You will quite enjoy your tea and your rest when they come, mamma. Now we really are at the top."

"I don't know what you call the top," said Lady Augusta; "we have not been going up hill at all. I can't think why you talk so, Helen; and Annette did not make my bed at all comfortable last night. We will go back, Sir Henry. I want to go back to England."

Helen sighed bitterly, and offered no reply.

"Pietro is taking off the horse he hired, I see," said Sir Henry, looking out. "That shows we shall have no more hills. I don't think we needed help, only Pietro is so careful. The Tyrol peasant will have a good journey to travel to-night, if he has to make his way back to the Pusterthal with his tired animal. That can't be Cortina d'Ampezzo surely?"

and he pointed to a small inn, little more than a hovel, by the wayside.

It was an unfortunate question, for it drew Lady Augusta's attention again to the fact that it was rapidly growing dark, and that there were no signs of a human habitation, except the shelter to which Sir Henry had alluded, and which had been originally intended for a hospice; and the ruins of a castle standing on the ridge of one of the nearest hills, and in former days commanding the approach to the Tyrol through the Ampezzo pass.

"I don't know why we came here," she began; but she was interrupted by Sir Henry, in the determined tone which betrays a secret misgiving.

"Don't trouble yourself my dear; Cortina must be quite close now. Pietro,"—he summoned the voiturier to the carriage,—“get on, man, quickly; we can't be out all night.”

Pietro, usually the most good-natured of voituriers, was a little out of heart, from the fact that he knew no more than Sir Henry of the exact distance his horses had still to travel. He mounted to his seat rather sullenly, gave his whip a very spiritless smack compared with that which he usually exhibited, and rounding the angle of the hill, turned his back upon the mountains, now growing gloomier and fiercer in their phantom grandeur, as the gathering darkness, and the last burning colouring of sunset enveloped their sharp peaks, and descended into the valley of Ampezzo.

The party in the carriage became silent. Lady Augusta again closed her eyes. Sir Henry turned round every instant, as if the action would hurry the horses, and make the distance shorter; and Susan looked back upon the mountains, and wrote the scene in her memory; whilst Helen's eye dwelt upon the wide opening valley, dark as one of Poussin's pictures, and her thoughts took their hue from the pine

forests, and the twilight shadows, and it seemed to her an image of her life.

"We go to the Stella d'Oro, remember, Pietro," shouted Sir Henry, when the twinkle of a light was seen in the distance.

"Not near yet, sir," was the answer; and the voiturier quickened his pace.

"There is a carriage before us, I think," said Helen, leaning out; "I wonder whether they know the way better than we do."

"There is no mistaking the way in a country like this," said Sir Henry, impatiently; "you couldn't get out of the road if you wished it. Distance is the only thing,—a monstrous long journey it is."

"I wonder what hotel those people are going to," said Helen; "they will have the best choice of beds if we don't take care: not that it signifies for us, only for mamma."

"A choice of straw, I suspect it will be," said Sir Henry. "You don't expect to find London hotels here, Helen, do you?"

"I don't know what I expect," said Helen, sadly; "but mamma is so tired, she will be quite ill if we don't stop soon."

"We are stopping, it seems," said Sir Henry, as Pietro suddenly drew his horses up. "What's the matter now?"

"I should just like to know how much further we may go to look for Cortina," was the reply. "There's a party beyond at a stand still;" and Pietro let himself down from his seat, and called out to the voiturier of the vehicle before them. A short conversation, in a patois compounded of German and Italian, followed, at the close of which Pietro returned, with the information that it was a good way still."

"Ask what inn they go to," said Sir Henry; "ask if

they know anything about the Stella d'Oro. It won't do to give your mamma a bad night," he added, looking anxiously at Lady Augusta.

Pietro went back with his query. "The Post, or the Aquila Nera," called out an English voice, in the unmistakable accent of an English gentleman.

"Claude Egerton!" exclaimed Sir Henry, and he tried to push open the carriage door, but it resisted. The voiturier drove on, and Sir Henry finished his sentence quietly, by adding, "It couldn't have been though; he is kept at home."

Neither Susan nor Helen spoke again till they entered the village of Cortina d'Ampezzo, and stopped before the uninviting entrance of the Stella d'Oro.

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## CHAPTER LXVI.

"ONE person at least is happy to-night," said Helen, as she sat down upon the edge of a pallet bed, literally the only piece of furniture in the bare apartment, considered one of the good bed-rooms of the Stella d'Oro. I thought Pietro would have kissed the landlord in his delight at hearing Italian spoken at last.

"It does not seem like Italy," said Susan. She had made a seat of her carpet-bag, and was resting her back against the wall. "Are we both to sleep in that bed, Helen? as they say this is the only room we can have."

"I could sleep upon the ground," said Helen, "if it were only clean." She put the candle down upon the floor, and examined it.

"Better not," said Susan; "'what the eye does n't see the heart does n't grieve.'"

"But the body does, unfortunately," observed Helen. "Poor mamma! If they put her into a bed like this, what will become of her? Stuffed with straw, actually! I thought papa was laughing at me; and such hills and valleys! However, it will remind one of the Ampezzo pass."

"One shall scarcely need to be reminded of that," said Susan.

"No;"—Helen paused—"it was a longing of my childhood to travel. I remember once when I was a very little thing, and had been hearing people talk about it, I prayed that I might. When the prayer is granted, I suppose one ought not to murmur at the way."

"What have you done with Lady Augusta?" asked Susan, rather abruptly.

"Left her with Annette. I tried to do what I could, but it wouldn't do. She says she is cold, and she has had the stove lighted; she will find it too much by and by, but one can't help it. It will make that odd ante-room comfortable for papa. Annette has taken out the back of the stove which opens into it, and now it looks like an English fireplace. One likes that, in spite of being in Italy."

"It must be cold so high as we are," said Susan. "It is cold now."

"The Post or the Aquila Nera might have been better than this," said Helen.

"Yes," was the only reply. Susan rose from her carpet-bag, and unlocked it.

"Was it Claude Egerton?" said Helen.

"I think so;" but Susan did not look round.

"I wonder how he came here," said Helen.

"He won't travel as we do," observed Susan quickly.

"No;" Helen thought for a moment. "I am not sure, Susan, that we were wise in coming."

"Lady Augusta will be better when we are at rest again,"



said Susan; "when we get to Venice. The long journeys are too much for her."

"And the discomfort," said Helen. She looked round the room disconsolately. "I suppose Annette will be here presently; there are no bells."

"We may as well trust to her," said Susan; "we can do nothing;" and as she spoke a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Annette, and the peasant girl who acted as chambermaid.

"Miladi waits tea," said Annette, reproachfully. "Sir Henry begs you to go, young ladies. Miss Graham! at your carpet-bag! What's the use? You go. I see to all; only you be patient. Here,"—and she beckoned authoritatively to the girls, and touched the bed—"due—tu comprends—zwei."

"And some water, Annette? can't we have a little water?" said Helen.

"Ah! dell' acqua,—wasser,—water; you fetch some." Annette pushed the chambermaid out of the room, and then followed to see that she obeyed orders.

"Annette is in her glory," said Helen; "she always is when every one else is in despair; "why don't we fetch the water ourselves, Susan?"

"Because we don't know where to find it, I suppose," said Susan, laughing. "And that ante-room, which they call a sitting-room, with all our doors opening into it, is like the sea; one is afraid to cross it and explore the regions on the other side. How much water will they give us, I wonder! Our chambermaid looks as if she had never seen such an element."

Annette came back with a small basin, and a smaller jug, and one towel. "It was all they could have then," she said, in a threatening tone; "so they must be contented. If they would travel amongst *les rochers, les montagnes*, what

ould they expect? And poor Miladi! tired out: wanting her tea! They must go at once."

" 'Beggars musn't be choosers,' " said Susan. She took up one corner of the towel, and dipped it in the water, and gave another to her cousin. But Helen was thinking of something else, and let it fall.

" Mamma didn't ask for me after I left her, did she, Annette? "

" No, mademoiselle. Miladi only wants her tea; " and Annette opened the door into the ante-room, in spite of Helen's warning that she was not ready.

" She didn't say anything about my having the other bed in her room, did she? " continued Helen.

" No, mademoiselle. Miladi said to me, ' Annette, you sleep there.' And I think it better, Miladi depends upon me."

Annette spoke proudly, conscious of her own importance.

" Please go and pour out the coffee, Susan; I am coming. Annette, you may wait to get the room ready."

The door closed, and when Helen was left alone, in the bare, uncarpeted, dreary chamber of the homely inn, she knelt by the side of the little pallet bed, and as tears coursed each other down her cheeks, prayed as she had never prayed in her own splendidly furnished apartment at Ivors, that God would be pleased to pardon the many, many sins of her wilful youth, and permit her to atone to her father and her step-mother for the sorrow she had caused them, by the devotion of her future life.

That was Helen's constant prayer now. There was one thought ever in her mind; her faults, her follies, had been the indirect, though possibly not the immediate cause of the wreck of Lady Augusta's health, and of the powers of her mind.


Coffee, fresh eggs, an omelette, and some eatable bread!

The Stella d'Oro rose in Helen's estimation when she found that Lady Augusta could make a hearty meal; but it was only a sad pleasure, after all. Lady Augusta was like a child now. When her bodily comforts were attended to, she was satisfied to remain, without troubling herself either with the past or the future. She was irritable indeed when the next day's journey was mentioned. "If they were comfortable where they were," she said, "why should they not stay? The people were very civil, she did not like moving; now they were in Italy, they ought to be contented."

"Only near Italy, not quite in it, yet," said Helen, in a soothing tone. "We must pass Zuel first. That must be some miles beyond this. Besides, mamma, you know we want to reach Venice."

"You shall go about in a gondola, then, my dear," said Sir Henry; "you will like that motion, it is so easy."

Lady Augusta only shook her head, and muttered something about not liking gondolas, and wishing to go to bed. Helen summoned Annette from the room, where she was employed in superintending the arrangement of a second bed, and a washing-stand, and Lady Augusta departed; Helen following her to the door of her apartment, and begging to be allowed to help her, but receiving only an abrupt negative.

"Now for plans!" said Sir Henry, as he pushed aside his coffee cup, and referred to his constant friend, Murray. "It doesn't do to discuss them with your mamma, Helen. I can't make out at all where Pietro means to take us to-morrow. Belluno—that is out of our way; Santa Croce—'inn miserable;' Sarravalle, Ceneda—too far; Longarone—'Post improved of late years;' that does n't sound well; but it is the only thing within reach that I can see. I wonder,"—he started up and then sat down again,— "If that were really Claude Egerton, he would be sure to know; but it could n't have been, certainly it could n't."

Susan answered without raising her eyes from the pocket-book, in which she was making a few pencil notes. "Isabella said in the letter which I had at Innsbruck, that Mr. Egerton had been at Wingfield, and that he was making particular inquiries as to our route."

"A man may do that without intending to follow it," said Sir Henry. "If we were in a civilized place, we might end and inquire for Claude at the Post, and the Aquila Nera. But these fellows talk such a jargon. And as to going oneself——" he drew his chair nearer to the fire burning at the back of the stove;—"I declare it's as cold as December, for all they call it Italy."

He devoted himself again to the guide book. "Helen, you are a good hand at reckoning distances; just reckon these with me."

Helen tried to follow where her father's finger pointed, but she could not give her attention, and Sir Henry appealed to Susan.

"I can't think what has happened to you to-night, you seem both good for nothing. Bed is the best place for you after all. Why don't you go? We shall have to start early to-morrow."

"I can't go till I am sure mamma is comfortable," said Helen; "but that need n't keep you, Susan. Papa, would it be really impossible to find out more about our journey to-morrow?"

Susan had closed her book, and lighted her candle, but she waited to hear the answer.

"I don't know who is to help us, unless it may be Claude," said Sir Henry.

"It will be very bad for mamma to have an uncertain distance," continued Helen. "The moment there is any doubt as to what is to be done, she becomes so nervous."

"Yes." Sir Henry looked at his watch, then at the fire.

"It is late; they will be gone to bed. I think we had better make inquiry the first thing in the morning. Pietro will go then, but he and his horses must be fast asleep by this time."

Susan took up her candle, and said good night.

"I shall come soon," said Helen. "How very tired you look, Susan!"

Susan only smiled. As she left the room, Sir Henry remarked: "People used to say that Susan had even spirits; I don't think that is at all the case now."

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## CHAPTER LXVII.

"A GLORIOUS morning, Helen, and your mamma has had a good night, Annette says. We shall do famously now." Sir Henry made his appearance in the ante-room at eight o'clock, rubbing his hands, and walked up to the window and back again to the door, and looked out into the passage to see if breakfast was coming. "A glorious morning! we ought to have been off, though, by this time. Not a place to stay in, this, in spite of your mamma's wishes. A very shabby apology for a bed they gave me; if I had n't been dead tired, I could n't possibly have slept. And for cleanliness—it's best not to inquire too minutely. What are you doing there, child?"

"Arranging some crochet work for mamma," said Helen. "When she stops in the middle of the day, she likes to have some work."

"Always thoughtful," said Sir Henry; and he patted her shoulder.

Tears rose in Helen's eyes.

"Not sad, my child, eh?" he continued. "We shall do very well again, depend upon it. Markham assured me that time and change were the only things wanted. And for other matters, you know, Helen, I don't quarrel with you, whatever the rest of the world may do."

"It would not signify for the world," said Helen, "if I did not quarrel with myself."

"I don't see the cause you have," continued Sir Henry, a little impatiently. "Mordaunt was a scoundrel; one can't hide the fact. You had a full right to cast him off, and you were n't answerable for any consequences."

"I ought never to have cast him on," said Helen, attempting to answer her father in a tone as light as his own. "If I had n't been led—but I don't excuse myself,—dear papa, please don't teach me to do so."

"That German woman was a desperate humbug!" said Sir Henry. "Ah, Helen! if I had a wish—but, however, you are free, I always told you so. By the bye, I sent Pietro to the Post, and the Aquila Nera, this morning to inquire for Claude, but I could n't find out anything. Three English gentlemen slept at the Post, but they were off at seven, and forgot to put their names in the book. If we do come up with him, it would be pleasant enough for me; but I don't know about you, child. What do you say?" Sir Henry put his hand under Helen's chin, and made her look at him.

"I suppose we should manage pretty well," was Helen's constrained answer, and she turned away, and knocked at Lady Augusta's door.

Annette answered the knock. "Miladi is just ready; she comes to breakfast this instant! Ah! the coffee not up; stop, you go to Miladi, mademoiselle. The carpet bag is to be locked; then Pietro will come for it; are you ready? And Miss Graham:—you tell Miss Graham, she must not wait. Why don't they bring the coffee?"

Annette bustled herself out of the ante-room, catching up stray articles in her way, to be thrust into a certain bag kept for emergencies and last hopes, and Helen went to Lady Augusta.

"Papa says you slept well, dear mamma; I am so glad. Is there anything else to be put into the carpet bag? Let me fasten your boot for you."

"Stop, Helen; the floor is so dirty; you must not kneel upon it;" and Lady Augusta laid her handkerchief on the ground. "Such a nasty place this is! I wonder why we came here; we would have paid handsomely for better rooms."

"We are going on to Venice, you know, mamma," said Helen; "we shall find beautiful hotels there, which once were palaces. You must come and have some breakfast, and then we shall start; and such a lovely day! You will like to have your breakfast," she repeated, trying to draw away Lady Augusta's attention from the little courtyard underneath the window, where Pietro, surrounded by peasants and ostlers, was employed in packing the carriage.

"I don't know the good of going to Venice; I shan't be better there. English people are n't wise to come abroad. Annette tells me that there are more English people here; she says that Claude has come after you, Helen. But it's no use for him; it's no use for any one. You never mean to please me."

"I would try to please you in any way I could, dear mamma." Helen spoke very calmly; she had been now too long accustomed to this kind of reproach to be shocked at it, and she took it as part of her punishment. "But you will come to breakfast; the coffee will be cold."

She led Lady Augusta into the ante-room, poured out her coffee, cut her roll in slices, and took care that there should be just enough chicken placed on her plate, and then

Lady Augusta for the first time said, "Thank you;" and Helen sat down contented.

"The carriage is ready, Miladi. Sir Henry is waiting. Let me take the carriage bag. Mademoiselle, you carry the book. Miss Graham,—ah me! where is Miss Graham? Too tiresome! Miladi, you won't go alone; nobody else will put you comfortable. Miss Graham!" Annette rushed to Susan's door.

"Miss Graham is gone down," said Helen. "She is never late."

"Never! a long day!" Annette shrugged her shoulders. "But we come; we leave *ce vilain lieu*. *Ah les montagnes! que je les deteste!*" and she shook her hand at the window, in defiance of the green hills which looked down upon the little inn.

Sir Henry was examining the horses, and talking to Pietro. Susan stood by him.

"Capo di Ponte, you say? I don't see it mentioned."

"Capo di Ponte; good beds at Capo di Ponte," said the landlord, proud of the first English words he had learnt.

"Who told you about Capo di Ponte, Pietro?" asked Susan.

Sir Henry turned round quickly. "You here, Susan! how you startled me! Better get into the carriage, child, and settle yourself."

But Susan lingered; Sir Henry was impatient. "I shall manage it all; don't be fidgety."

She could not help herself then; but she leaned out of the carriage to hear Pietro's answer.

"A man at the Post, who saw the English party off this morning," replied Pietro. "They don't go there themselves; they stop short at Longarone; but that makes to-morrow's journey too long."

"Yes, yes, I understand. We get to Treviso to-morrow."



No chance of coming up with Claude Egerton then, if it should be he."

Susan put down her veil, and was so interested in observing Annette's final adjustment of boxes and carpet bags, that she averted her face completely from Lady Augusta and Helen, not even looking round, when Helen urged that they should change places, and asserted that the back seat, on such a fine day, could not make her uncomfortable.

There is a great charm, doubtless, in visiting a country long familiar to us by description, and which we have, as it were, made part of our own by experience; but there is a greater still in that which we know only by its place in the map, and the loveliness of which we discover, as for the first time, for ourselves. The mountains of Friuli around Tai de Cadore may, perhaps, bring to us but few associations; yet, if we have ever looked at the background of Titian's pictures, we may see the impression which they made upon a mighty genius, and may trace the scenes impressed upon his childish imagination, with all the brilliancy belonging to early age, and scarcely to be diminished, even when revisited in after years, and criticised by the sober judgment, and with the careworn feeling of manhood.

For, in truth, it is a glorious country. Jagged mountains, their summits occasionally tipped with snow; lesser hills covered with wood, with here and there huge yellowish crags, giving a peculiar warmth of colouring to the scenery; deep rocky ravines; villages, and churches, dotted about on all sides; and the ruins of ancient castles, proudly looking down upon them from the projecting cliffs; and all felt, rather than seen, beneath the blue Italian sky, and under the soothing influence of the southern air!—it is a land to dream of. When it has passed, and memory recurs to it, it is with a strange, incredulous doubt whether the eye, now profaned by common sights, can ever have been permitted to gaze upon such a vision of beauty.

Helen and Susan leaned over the carriage, drinking in with delight the views which every turn of the road brought before them, whilst even Lady Augusta was sometimes roused to observation, and owned that it was much warmer and pleasanter in Italy than in the Tyrol. They were descending into the valley at an easy pace, following the course of the little river Piave. Sir Henry having satisfied himself that it was a splendid country, was looking out for Perarollo, "‘Inn fair,’" as he informed them, after due consultation with Murray. There they were to dine; there he hoped that they might get something fit for Lady Augusta to eat. "You need n't look scornful, Helen; rocks and mountains won't keep you alive. What does Pietro say, I wonder?" and touching Annette, who was seated on the carriage box, he told her to inquire how long it would be before they reached Perarollo.

"Un petit quart-d'heure, Sir Henry. Is Miladi tired?" was Annette's anxious reply.

"Trois quart-d'heures, you mean, Annette. Always multiply by three, when you are travelling. You have no biscuits with you, I suppose? Lady Augusta looks as if she would like something."

"*Des biscuits! non. Ce vilain pays!* Bread very bad; sandwiches never heard of; how do the people live. *Ah! quel costume!*" and forgetting Lady Augusta, Annette lifted up her hands in astonishment, as a peasant girl passed them, with the Tyrolean man's hat, a gown made of a blue bodice and red skirt, and wearing a silver necklace, with a cross depending from it.

"She is stopped to be drawn. *Ce sont des Anglais!*" called out Annette, in delight, looking back as the carriage went on. "See, there are some gentlemen sketching. Look, mademoiselle, look."

Helen did not take the trouble to turn round, but Susan,

from the back seat, did what she thought would please Annette, and bent forward.

"Did you see them, Susan?" asked Helen, laughing; "were they English wild animals?"

"They are gone now," said Susan; "or rather we are. Will you allow me to look at Murray?" she added, taking the book from its place by Sir Henry's side.

Susan was busy with the guide book for more than the "petit quart-d'heure" of which Annette had spoken; but just as they began to descend the wonderful zig-zag road which carries the traveller from the Alpine scenery around Cadore into the picturesque little village of Perarollo, she gave it as the result of her researches, that if they had set off earlier, and had chosen to stop on the road, they might have visited Pieve di Cadore, the birthplace of Titian.

"I suppose the people we passed had been doing that," said Helen.

A remark to which no reply was obtained.

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## CHAPTER LXVIII.

"Now, Susan, mamma is comfortable and Annette looking after her, shall we attempt a sketch?" said Helen. The first Italian dinner was concluded; and Lady Augusta, having acknowledged that certainly, though the place was so miserable and dirty, they did manage to send up things in a very different way from the Tyrol, had taken to her crochet, as Annette remarked, quite kindly, and would no doubt be willing to sit quiet till Pietro was ready.

They left the little inn, and strolled through the village, scattered at the foot of steep hills, and affording scarcely any level ground except the high road.

"It is beyond sketching," said Susan, as she glanced at the wall of cliff by which they had descended into the village, and along the face of which the road could be traced in lines which seemed at a distance nearly horizontal.

"Cowardly, that is," exclaimed Helen. "If I don't please other people in sketching, I please myself, even if I can only make half-a-dozen strokes. Just see what a picture that would be, where the water is rushing from above, descending, one cannot see how, from the hills. The meeting of the Piave and — what is the other river?"

"The Boite. But they scarcely look like natural streams. They must have been pent up, I fancy, artificially, and are like foaming English mill streams. I suppose if one asked why it was done one should not comprehend the answer. Oh, dear! one's ignorance! Is there anything like travelling to make one understand how great it is?"

"Natural or artificial," said Helen, in a determined tone, "I shall try it." And she seated herself upon a low wall by the side of the river, facing the mountainous zig-zag road and the ravine through which the water had forced its way as it descended from the hills.

"And I shall walk on a little further and see how the village looks from the heights," said Susan. "I can't sketch to-day."

The accent of her voice struck Helen; and she said, a little uneasily, "You are not well."

"Not so very, as people say. The carriage tires me, I shall be all the better for a walk; and I like to be alone, indeed I do: you know I am always honest."

"Yes, always," said Helen, heartily. "But, Susan, I think sometimes that in caring for mamma we don't care for you."

"I can care for myself," said Susan. "Besides, why should I be thought of more than you?"

"Because I have been thought of all my life," said Helen; "and it has spoilt me. That is not bitterness, but truth; and I am learning to bear it. Now go; if we begin talking I shall never sketch. Remember, we have only an hour."

Susan lingered for a moment, and then slowly pursued her solitary way.

Strange it seemed to herself that she should be so unchanged, so English still, so wrapt up in home and home feelings, in what almost seemed selfishness. Here, in that remote village, hidden amongst the vast hills whose existence she had scarcely before realised, and with the scenes through which she had previously passed,—the Rhine and its bright beauty and historical associations,—Munich, with its glorious galleries of art,—Innsbruck, the city of the noble Peasant land, all fresh in her recollection, it seemed hard that she should still be the same. She had rested upon the hope that travelling would bring forgetfulness, though what she wished to forget she would not trust herself to acknowledge.

But even amidst the charms of that surpassing beauty, Susan felt herself to be living in the past. The bodily eye rested upon the mountains of Italy; but the eye of the mind travelled back to the chamber of death, the stealthy footsteps, the hushed voices, the fervent prayer, the dying grasp which had joined her hand with Claude's, the voice that had whispered to him to be kind.

And he had been kind, to her mother, and Isabella, and Anna, to herself also, in those first days of sorrow. But since then they had never met. Lady Augusta's illness had summoned Mrs. Graham and Susan to London; and Claude, though constant in his inquiries, had never appeared in Grosvenor Place. She would probably seldom see him again. He could not come to Ivors, and there was little to call him to Wingfield; and in London Susan would most likely be at Grosvenor Place, and Claude would therefore never come in

her way. They were separated by circumstances: it was the will of God, and doubtless it was well that it should be so.

It was foolish to think of him now, very unwise to dwell upon the distant probability that he had followed them abroad, and that they should meet. Certainly the voice they had heard was like his, the figure at the side of the road resembled him, but the last thing he would be likely to do would be to take their route, even if he were abroad: he evidently dreaded so much to meet Helen. If he had made the inquiries which Isabella mentioned, it must have been with the view of avoiding them.

And now—yes, the point was quite settled; a carriage was descending the hill, two gentlemen in it, a stout, elderly man, and a tall, slight youth; it must have been he that she had mistaken for Claude. Susan felt a sudden pang, then a great sense of relief. She stood upon a bank to escape the dust; the carriage drove past, the gentlemen looking at her curiously. When it was gone she did not feel any inclination to ascend the road higher, and, seeing a little mountain path leading to a cottage above the bank, she pursued it for some distance, and then sat down to rest.

Her mind was quieter now, more in its ordinary state; and she took out her sketch book, ashamed of the indolence which had prevented her from using it before. But the situation which she had chosen was not favourable, and she moved on. A piece of rock close to her was inviting for a foreground; and passing round at the back, she came suddenly and unexpectedly in sight of Claude Egerton.

It could be no other than he. His back was towards her, he was drawing; but there was no mistaking him, he was the traveller whom she had seen by the roadside; he ought to have made the third in the carriage which had just driven by. She drew back behind the rock, her limbs trem-

bling so that she could not stand; and seating herself on the ground she threw aside her sketch book, and thought—she knew not of what, only she seemed chained to the spot, and minutes appeared hours, as she expected every instant to see Claude descend the bank into the road, and pass away from her sight.

The rush of the brawling, mingling little rivers below deadened every other sound, so that Susan could not hear if Claude moved; and the rock was so situated that it was possible for him to go back to the road without her seeing him. The idea did not strike her for some seconds; when it did she instinctively altered her position a few paces, and in doing so, the sketch book fell out of her hand and rolled down the bank.

Claude saw it, hurried after it, and looking round for the owner, confronted Susan. His start of surprise and pleasure told his tale instantly—the meeting was accidental. But he came up to her, his face radiant with delight.

“Miss Graham here! alone! how strange! how very satisfactory!”

“Not quite alone,” said Susan; and her face was crimsoned with a deep blush. “I have left the rest of the party in the village.”

“But you are alone for the moment. Stay, will you not?” As Susan moved down the bank, he stopped her. “I have so many things to say, and I so little expected this pleasure. I did not know you were in Italy,”

“We talked of Salzburg and Vienna, when we left home,” said Susan; “but it was Helen’s wish to see Italy.”

His face changed instantly. He said in an altered, quiet tone, “Is Helen—is Miss Clare well?”

“Tolerable, better than she was in London; but won’t you come?” Susan, in her agitation, forgot everything but her wish to escape being alone with Claude.

"No; I can't come. Wait, please; don't leave me yet." Claude stood still, and Susan was obliged to do the same. "Tell me about Lady Augusta."

"I don't know what to say. Her bodily health improves; but the mind is a wreck."

"Such a shock! such a terrible shock for all!" he said, thoughtfully. "Can you enjoy yourselves? It is very splendid." And he looked round at the mountains.

"We enjoy it immensely at times," said Susan. "Perhaps we should enjoy it too much if we had no cares."

"Yourself still," he said, smiling. "It makes me almost a boy again. Are you staying here?"

"No; we are on our way to Venice."

His face lighted up brilliantly; but a cloud soon came over it again. "Venice is our destination too; but I don't know when we shall be there. I am under Captain Hume's orders. You remember him; Sir John Hume's brother. He has come abroad for his son's health. Sir John and his family are at Venice; and we are to meet them there. Do you go on to Venice immediately?" he added.

"I believe so; but Sir Henry will tell you everything. He will be terribly vexed if he does n't see you. And we are intending to set off again directly."

"Like ourselves; strange that we should be travelling the same road. I can give you no news from home, I suppose; you must have heard since I left England. I was at Wingfield, and saw them all;—your mother, and Anna, and Isabella. Is that very impertinent?" he added with a doubtful smile; "and, shall I confess? sometimes, when you are not present, I say, Susan."

"I like you to say it," replied Susan. She spoke the words eagerly, yet corrected herself directly, and added, with some stiffness, "I like you to do what is most pleasant to yourself."



He seemed thrown back for a moment, and answered, "Home ties and home friendships are strong in a foreign land; you must forgive me. Did you say that Sir Henry was to be found at the inn?"

"I think so; but I am not sure. We left him there. Helen and I came out together."

"Miss Clare is with you then?" He glanced round anxiously.

"She is sketching in the village. It is good for her to be away from Lady Augusta, when she can be; it is such a wearing life."

"And Helen waits upon Lady Augusta entirely, does she? I heard so in London."

"She would wait upon her more, if she were allowed," said Susan. "But Lady Augusta is very strange. No one but Annette knows how to manage her. It frets Helen," she continued; "she reproaches herself."

"I don't know why she should," he said, quietly.

"I ought to reproach myself, if any one does," said Susan. "But I don't," she added; "I feel I am not answerable for consequences if I did right." And she raised her eyes with confidence to Claude's face.

"You don't doubt it? you can't think any one would blame you for an instant," he exclaimed. "I, for one, thank you from my heart."

His voice shook; and he hurried on a few paces before Susan, but turned to assist her down the bank.

"There is Helen," said Susan, "sitting on the little wall by the river. Don't you see her?"

Claude had observed her long before Susan pointed her out; but now, when his attention was drawn towards her, he seemed disinclined to go on.

"She has seen us," continued Susan. "Look, she is coming towards us."

Helen made a few steps to meet them, then turned and walked rapidly back to the inn.

"I see; it is as I feared. My presence is unwelcome," said Claude, rather bitterly.

"You must not judge her hardly," replied Susan. "It is only awkwardness."

"Of course, of course. But I don't wish to make her feel awkward. I trust to you; you will make Sir Henry understand why I did not wait. I trust entirely to you." He drew off his glove to shake hands; but just at that moment Sir Henry came up.

"Claude, my dear fellow!" Sir Henry grasped Claude's hand with both his. "Where in the world did you drop from, I should say, only I have heard all about you. I met Captain Hume and George. How ill the boy looks! but this air is sure to do him good. So you are going on our road. Come in, we have just ten minutes before we start; Hume and his son said they were going to walk about a little before dinner, so they won't want you; and Lady Augusta and Helen——" Sir Henry checked the words which would naturally have followed, and added mournfully, "You will find Lady Augusta changed; but she will like to see an old friend."

"Are you sure I sha'n't intrude?" asked Claude, drawing back.

"Not a bit, man. Intrude! It will do her good. I told her you were here; and Helen said——"

"Did Miss Clara think it wise? I should fear it might do harm," continued Claude.

"Nonsense, my good fellow! I saw Helen a moment ago; and she said it was best to take all things naturally, and Helen knows best. She is devoted to Lady Augusta,—a pattern daughter, I must say that for her."

Sir Henry drew Claude into the passage of the inn,

without allowing him time for any further excuses. He seemed in a nervous hurry to have the meeting over, and would not take Claude's suggestion that he should be announced before making his appearance in Lady Augusta's presence.

"Better not, much better not. She will only work herself up into an agitation. It will do all very well if it comes naturally, as Helen says." Sir Henry entered the room; and Claude stood at the entrance. Lady Augusta was sitting with her back to the door, looking out of the window; her crochet work lay in her lap; she had her hand upon it; and Helen was trying gently to disengage it from her, whilst Annette stood by threateningly, saying that, if they did not start directly, it would be the last night over again, they should not be in till dark. It was the old trouble; where Lady Augusta was, there she chose to remain, at least whenever she was asked to go. There was the long indulged determination of her natural character, only now with very little reason to control it.

"Dear mamma, I think you will let me put up your crochet," said Helen; "it will be quite ready for you to begin again when we stop by and by."

"I don't wish to stop," began Lady Augusta; but Sir Henry came forward, and his step made his wife start, and caused Helen to take her hand, and say soothingly, as she glanced at the door, "Here is papa come to tell us that we must go; and he has brought Claude Egerton to see you for a minute; he is travelling the same way that we are."

Her voice did not tremble in the least; but Claude's was scarcely audible, as he obeyed a sign made by Sir Henry, and approached, and shook hands, first with Lady Augusta, then with Helen, and said to the latter, "I hope you are better than you were when I heard of you in London?"

Lady Augusta appeared to have some difficulty at first in recognising him. Presently, however, a gleam of pleasure came over her face, and she said it was very kind of Claude; he always was kind; now he was come, she did not see why they might not all go back to England together."

Claude turned his head away; for a tear dimmed his eye.

"It's a bad time of the day with her," whispered Sir Henry. "She was much better at starting. Augusta, my dear, you will like to think that we shall have a friend at Venice, when we get there."

"Are you coming with us?" Lady Augusta for a moment spoke quite like herself; and Helen looked up eagerly at Claude, but bent her head again as she caught his eye fixed upon her.

"You must promise to meet us again," said Sir Henry. "Anything belonging to home does her good, though Markham declared change was the only thing needed. It is so, isn't it, Helen?" he added, observing Claude's doubtful face.

And Helen answered, with sad composure, "I hope it may do good; I think she likes it." She addressed herself again to Lady Augusta. "I think, mamma, you had better come into the next room, and put your bonnet and shawl on. Claude will not go till we return."

She appealed to Claude as she might have done in other days. His thoughts were quite occupied with Lady Augusta. He answered directly, "No, indeed; we have to wait here more than half an hour longer to rest the horses."

"And Claude will meet us at Venice, my dear," continued Sir Henry. "You must," he added, as Lady Augusta at length unwillingly rose from her seat, and followed Helen's suggestion. "It was just the chance how she might receive you; but it does her good evidently. So we shall depend on you."

Claude's answer was unsatisfactory. "My movements depend upon others. It is possible Captain Hume may be summoned to Milan to meet a relation; if so, I shall probably go with him there, and then make my way back to Venice a week hence by another route. Whether we return to England by Austria or France is equally uncertain."

"The blessing of travelling like an independent gentleman, without incumbrance!" said Sir Henry,—and there was an accent of real sadness under his assumed cheerfulness. "With three ladies one is under strict orders." He looked round. "What, Susan, here still! we seem to have quite forgotten you, child."

"Have you?" replied Susan; "it did not strike me." She was sitting down by the table, her bag and parasol in her hand, quite ready to go.

"Persons who are always remembering others must make up their minds to be often forgotten themselves," said Claude, with a smile. "I dare say you have never once been late during the whole journey."

"I have only myself to take care of," said Susan.

"Helen is very much improved in that respect, I must say," observed Sir Henry; "she makes a great effort, and then she is generally helping her mamma. I think, Susan, I had better go and see that the carriage is all right; and you can bring Lady Augusta down after me." Sir Henry, always restless when upon the point of starting, hurried down stairs.

Claude drew near to Susan when Sir Henry was gone. "Must I come to Venice?" he said; "you will tell me."

Susan answered hurriedly, "I don't know,—I can't say. Do you mean about Lady Augusta?"

"Yes; will it do her harm? I am sure you will judge better than Sir Henry."

" " " will know best," said Susan, rising; "I will call her."

"No, no ! I entreat you not." He put out his hand to detain her. "Excuse me, I would much rather trust to you. Can't you tell me?"

"It may be excitement," said Susan, coldly.

He looked exceedingly pained. "I was afraid so. Thank you for telling me. I will take care, even if we should unfortunately be in Venice together."

"But I am not sure; I can't really say. If you would only let me ask Helen." Susan was evidently distressed at the strong effect of her words.

"No, not on any account." He spoke almost impatiently, and added, "It has been a great pleasure, seeing you here. You don't know how I long for sights and faces akin to home. You won't think that weak," he added, with a marked emphasis; "you understand always."

Susan bent her head down, and searched for something in her carriage-bag.

Claude waited for a moment, and, as he heard a hand laid on the handle of the door opening into the inner room, added, in a low voice, "One thing more you will tell me: Helen,—is she happy? that is, as she can be under such circumstances?"

"Happier than she ever was before," said Susan; "she is so good!"

Helen came in; and Claude withdrew from Susan in evident embarrassment.

Lady Augusta looked more her former self in her travelling-dress; the bonnet-cap helped to fill up the hollows of her face, and made her appear less thin; and the shawl covered her tall, spare figure, now bent from illness. Claude gave her his arm to take her down stairs; and she went with him, talking all the way of their meeting, and urging him to join them at Venice: she was so eager, that it was almost impossible not to promise. Helen follow With Su-

san. As they stepped into the carriage, Helen offered her hand to Claude, and said, "Mamma wishes it; and we shall all be glad to see you."

There was very little constraint in her manner; but she did not speak to him again, though he stood by the carriage for several minutes whilst they were waiting for Pietro.

Susan had the last pressure of his hand, the last smile, and the last words, spoken in an under tone of friendly, almost affectionate confidence:—"Still I trust to you more than to any one else."

Lady Augusta was the only person inclined to talk for the next quarter of an hour. Helen answered her, but with an effort which any other person would have perceived. Sir Henry studied Murray, being determined, as he said, to get at Venice properly; and Susan's eye followed the course of the Piave, as it made its way through the ravine which they had just entered, whilst a smile of peace rested upon her lips, which, to Helen at least, needed no explanation.

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## CHAPTER LXIX.

A VERY indifferent resting-place was Capo di Ponte, found after long and anxious expectation whether any such place were in existence. Moreover, the afternoon journey was by no means so interesting as that of the morning. The grandeur and beauty of the Friulian mountains was gone; and the road, after emerging from the ravine immediately beyond Perarollo, led into a broader valley, affording space for the Piave to spread itself out, and leave a rough, shingly beach at its edge, which considerably injured its picturesque-ness. Longarone, a bright-looking little village on the side of the river, might have been better chosen for the halting-place, if bodily comfort only had been consulted; but there

were secret reasons against it in the minds of most of the party. Pietro thought of his horses, and the next day's journey to Treviso; Sir Henry disliked coming to a standstill early in the afternoon, unless there was something very remarkable to be seen; Annette dreaded the weary hours before bed-time, to be spent in attending to Lady Augusta, and helping her with her crochet; Helen remembered that Longarone would bring them again within reach of Claude Egerton; and Susan,—her feelings were a problem not so easily solved. And so Longarone was passed; and Pietro smacked his whip triumphantly, and drove on at a great pace, nodding, and smiling, and chatting to Annette with consummate *nonchalance*; taking care, however, to make an excuse for stopping every now and then to make secret inquiries of the peasants; whilst poor Sir Henry,—his eyes fixed one moment upon the "Handbook," and the next raised doubtfully to look around him,—was heard to murmur to himself, "Very perplexing! very uncomfortable! not at all sure there is such a place! Very strange that Murray should n't mention it! I'll row that rascal, Pietro, well if he has misled us."

But Capo di Ponte came at last,—a straggling village, only remarkable for a long wooden bridge over the Piave, ornamented by the Winged Lion of St. Mark; and so carrying the thoughts back to the days when Venetian power extended itself far beyond the limits of the city of the sea.

The poverty-stricken little inn was crowded by groups of Italian peasants, neither very clean nor very respectable-looking. Lady Augusta uttered a faint exclamation of terror, declaring that they were in the land of banditti, and had been brought there to be murdered; and insisted, as usual, that they should all go back to England. But the travelling-carriage, as it drew up before the door, had the effect of dispersing the crowd immediately around; and they



withdrew to a convenient distance, watching, with marked interest, the proceedings of the strangers.

"*Uno, due, tre, quattro,*" exclaimed Annette, counting upon her fingers, as she made her way into the inn. "Where will they find so many rooms? *Ah ! quel pays ! quel pays !*"

But she was stopped by the smallest, briskest, blithest, most black-haired of Italian waiters, who showered upon her a volley of asseverations, promises, and ecstasies of all kinds. Rooms ! they had any, all ; an infinite number. Beds ! ah ! yes, superb. Supper ! instantly ; fresh eggs, fish, bread, meat, omelettes, *tutto, tutto, alla sua servizia* ; the lingering emphasis upon *tutto, tutto*, giving a depth of meaning which included what in London would certainly have been called every delicacy of the season.

"A salon ! where is the salon, Annette ?" asked Lady Augusta, reproachfully, as the little waiter threw open the door of a bed-room, and ushered them into a very moderate-sized apartment, with one large uncurtained bed in it.

"No salons here, Miladi," said Annette gruffly ; "they don't know what such things mean. Here ;"—and she caught the man by the arm, and held him, whilst he stood like a bird upon the point of taking wing. "*Cenere,—vous comprenez,—cenere ?*"

"*Ah ! si ;*" but the waiter stood still, his eyes opened to their fullest extent, with anxiety and eagerness.

"*Cenere !*" repeated Annette, angrily. "*Ah, qu'il est sot.*"

"*Cena, Annette !*" murmured Lady Augusta, in a faint voice, and she sank down in a chair by the bed ; and the little waiter uttered an exclamation of delight, and rushed to the door as if he had been shot.

"*Cena ! cenere !*" muttered Annette to herself. "*Cenere ! cena ! quelle langue. Pauvre Miladi.*"

"Not in this room, Annette," almost screamed Lady Augusta ; "tell him it must n't be here."

"*Pauvre Miladi!* we shall do quite well." "Mademoiselle, Miss Graham;" Annette addressed Helen and Susan, who had just followed her into the room; "You go out with Sir Henry; take him out; let him have a walk. Miladi and I, we arrange everything; *allez, allez,*"—and in a moment she was fiercely confronting the waiter. "*Der müssen:* ah, why do we go through so many countries, to talk so many languages. *Voyez vous;—bisogna vedere—* what must I say, mademoiselle? I forget. How call they landlady here?"

"There is no occasion to call her," said Susan; "here she is. Now you can arrange everything."

"*Ah! oui, oui;* then you go." Annette drew forth a little Italian vocabulary, which she had been carefully studying during the journey.

"You had much better let us talk to her," said Helen. "You will be sure to blunder."

"Blunder! did I ever blunder yet? Then you take it your own way; see how you manage. I give it up; I leave it." Annette shrugged her shoulders, and scowled defiance.

"A Roman dictatorship was nothing to this," said Helen, aside to Susan; "I am only thankful that we left our courier at Innsbruck; we shouldn't have been allowed to choose our own road, if we had not. But I can't leave mamma in this way, to the mercies of Annette's Italian. Just go out with papa, and let me stay."

"Sir Henry will be disappointed," said Susan.

"That can't be helped. I don't mean to be undutiful; only go,—occupy him in some way, or he will be miserable."

Susan went down stairs, and found Sir Henry talking over the prospects of the next day with Pietro. Susan's suggestion that they should see what the place was like was just the *thing he wanted*, and they went out together.

A scramble over the rough stones, which formed the shore of the river, and which spread out on either side so as to form a very desolate and uninteresting feature in the scenery, was occupation for Sir Henry for the next three quarters of an hour; and then, being sufficiently tired, he proposed returning to the inn. Susan was only too glad not to have had a long *tête-à-tête* walk. Conversation with her uncle was generally painful, for he was always asking her what she thought of Lady Augusta, and she was obliged to disappoint him by confessing that she saw but very little, if any, improvement. This day, however, Sir Henry chose another topic, in the short distance which they walked along the road, as they came back from the river. He spoke of Claude Egerton, and regretted openly, that Helen had not been able to like him. "Claude may not be such an attractive man to a young girl, as many persons of his age are," he said; "there is a certain stiffness and coldness about him, a want of sunshine; but that is all to be attributed to his early life; he knew sorrow just when most boys know joy, and he has never recovered it. A happy marriage would make him quite another man; and then he is such a first-rate fellow! Hume was talking to me about him when we met; telling me all he has been doing at Helmsley. He has been down there staying with him. There is not a cottage on the estate which Claude has n't repaired, or added to; not a labourer that he does n't know, if not personally, at least sufficiently to look after his family, and take care that there is no want. Certainly, he has a capital agent on the spot, but he is down there continually, seeing after things himself, and working like a dray horse in Parliament besides. Where is there another man of Claude's age, and with his fortune, who would give himself up to work in that way? And yet you women can't like him, because he does n't

play the flute, and dance the polka, and won't sport a moustache. Ah! Susan, you are a very perplexing race."

"Very," said Susan; it was the only reply required of her, for they had reached the door of the inn, and Sir Henry hurried away from her, to see what progress had been made, in providing for Lady Augusta's comfort.

"Odd this! but not to be despised, eh, my dear?" was his cheerful observation to his wife, as he sat down at a square table, placed between the bed and the side wall of Lady Augusta's apartment.

"I don't see why they don't treat us better," said Lady Augusta. "Annette would n't ask for a salon, though I told her what to say."

"Something new and pleasant enough, once in a way," continued Sir Henry. "What are they going to give us, Helen?"

"Fish, and soup, and an omelette," said Helen. "I was afraid of trusting too much to tea and coffee."

"Very good; we shall do capitally. What have you been doing with yourself, my dear?"

"I have been reading to mamma," said Helen.

"Yes; Helen reads to me sometimes. I like that," said Lady Augusta. "We had not quite finished."

"I was reading the Psalms for the day," said Helen, with an air of apology. "It soothes her," she added, in an under-tone.

Sir Henry looked as if he thought it rather a strange and inconvenient time to choose for reading the Psalms, but in his good-nature he would not interfere. Helen went on reading; Lady Augusta listening, with her eyes closed, and Sir Henry striving to be reverent and attentive, though showing his restlessness by an impatient movement of his foot. He started up as Helen shut the book. "Now then for supper! *Cenere*, as Annette calls it; what a capital blun-

der! Are we to have a table-cloth, I wonder, Garçon?" He went to the door and called, and was answered by the black-haired waiter.

"*Ah! si, signor; un momento.*" The little man skipped into the room with a cloth over his arm, which he spread upon the table, puckering it into ornamental figures; then, after disappearing, he danced up to the table again with some bottles, placing green leaves in them for stoppers; and at length, with an air of ineffable satisfaction, and looking round upon the party with the evident inquiry, whether anything could possibly be more perfect, he laid before Sir Henry a dish of fish, name and species unknown.

"Now, my dear." Sir Henry put some on the plate before him, looked at it doubtfully, turned it over. "Will it do, Helen? I am afraid not." His usual expression of good-humoured contentment deserted him for the instant. He pushed it aside, pointed it out with an air of scorn to the little waiter, and in the best Italian he could collect thundered out, "*Via, via, male!*"

"*Si, signor, si. Grazia signor;* and the condemned fish was seized and carried off with the merriest of steps and the most civil of smiles.

Helen and Susan laughed heartily. Lady Augusta inquired mournfully why they did not give them something to eat, she was very hungry, and they had all to go to bed, and this was her bedroom; she could not think why Annette would not ask for a salon; she was quite sure they would be much better in England.

The waiter reappeared with something supposed to be an omelette, but which in reality looked very much more like what in England is called Yorkshire pudding. It was eatable, however, and so was the soup; and Lady Augusta, who was the person chiefly to be considered, contrived to make a tolerable repast, which, however, was no sooner ended, than

she insisted upon it she must go to bed directly ; and her apartment being the only sitting room, every one else was obliged to follow her example.

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CHAPTER LXX.

SUSAN and Helen occupied, as usual, the same room. A little trial it was to both ; friends though they were from childhood, and intimately acquainted with each other's habits and modes of thought, there was something very wearing in never being alone. This evening Susan felt it more especially. Helen was inclined to sit up and talk ; the very way in which she laid her candlestick upon the dressing-table and leisurely took out her journal was enough to prove it. Susan longed to be in bed, not that she might sleep, only that she might be quiet, still, to herself,—that she might think. The day had been singularly long and exhausting ; she felt as though months had been condensed into it. It seemed scarcely possible that she had parted from Claude only a few hours before, and that he was even then but a few miles distant from her ; and still less possible that they might meet at Venice. That, however, was doubtful. Again and again during the course of the afternoon she had said to herself that she would not think of it, she would not think of Claude at all ;—whilst the next moment found her recalling his looks, tone, manner, words, dwelling upon the peculiar marks of interest he had shown, and the undisguised pleasure he had evinced in meeting her.

Could it all be vanity ? petty, womanish vanity ? Susan perhaps was as free from that great weakness as any person of her age and sex, but she could discover it in herself when others would never have noticed it ; and now she blamed

herself for it, and felt humbled in her own sight. But the suspicion of a fault could not, as at other times, enable her to subdue it; and worn with the constantly recurring feeling which she could not conquer, it was a relief, even though for the moment she felt it to be an interruption and annoyance, to be addressed by Helen with the matter-of-fact inquiry,—  
“What time are we to start to-morrow?”

“Half-past eight, as usual, I believe,” answered Susan.  
“At least, I heard Pietro say so to my uncle.”

“Two more days and then we rest,” said Helen. “We could not go on much longer in this way.”

“Lady Augusta would be over-tired, I am afraid,” said Susan.

“Tired and excited,” said Helen; “I dread that the most. I am sure those London doctors were wrong; I could have managed her better if they would only have listened to me.”

“I doubt,” said Susan. “I am sure change was the thing needed, even though it may be an exertion at the time, and Lady Augusta may dislike it. You will find the benefit when you are at home again. It breaks up old habits.”

“Yes,” said Helen, thoughtfully, “if that be good; but I doubt it. Perhaps I am selfish, though; I could have done something for her in England, and I can do nothing here; Annette takes everything from me.”

“You do all you can,” said Susan, kindly.

Helen smiled, though with a bitter sadness in her expression. “Yes, I do all I can, and what is it? I read the Psalms to her sometimes, and put her cushions right, and the chances are that she makes Annette alter them directly afterwards.”

“But if it is not given you to do more, shouldn’t you be satisfied?” asked Susan.

Helen laid down her pen and sighed. “You don’t un-

derstand, Susan : I suppose it is not possible you could. If I were a Romanist, I could wear out my life with penances. I should like to do so now. I can understand their feeling, quite ; any thing to get rid of the perpetual fret of one's conscience."

"But, Helen," exclaimed Susan, eagerly ; "Sir Henry,—mamma,—every one tells you that you are not answerable."

"I know it," said Helen, coolly. "I am not idiot enough to suppose that I alone was the cause of that miserable fever. Perhaps—very likely, indeed—it would have been just the same if I had never come in the way. But it is no use arguing against feeling, Susan ; most especially there is none in trying to persuade one, one is an angel, when conscience says just the reverse. Whom have I ever come in contact with that I have not made wretched ? Who is there in the world that has to thank me for an hour's happiness ? Nay, let me speak, I know beforehand all you would say. You think that being sorry does away with it all ; but I am not sorry, at least not in the way you mean. I am not at all what people would call converted."

"You are altered," said Susan, "whatever you may choose to call it."

"I should be insane if I were not. Persons can't have such a shock as I have had without being so. If it were only having one's eyes opened to deceit where one imagined truth,"—and Helen's voice faltered as she thought of Madame Reinhard,—"one must view the world differently in consequence. But that is not being religious. It is not really loving and caring for religion ; a heathen might feel as I feel."

"But if he did, he would be on the high road towards becoming a Christian," said Susan.

"On the high road, possibly." Helen considered a little. "It does not follow that he might not wander out of it again."



I don't feel in the least sure that I should not go back to my old ways if temptation came in my path. I don't know what is to keep me."

"Gratitude," said Susan; "the feeling that you were stopped and warned."

"If I could feel it," replied Helen; "but I don't. I hate myself, that is all."

"So we must all hate ourselves, I suppose," said Susan.

"Your hatred is a different feeling from mine, though," continued Helen. "I am so angry with myself for having been taken in; that is one thing I can't get over; but there is no great virtue in it. And as to poor mamma,—I know I was a wretch; I teased and tormented her; and I would do anything in the world to help her now: but that is merely the longing to satisfy my own mind."

"I wish you would give up analysing your feelings," said Susan; "you would be much better and happier."

"I should be thankful if I could," said Helen; "but I am a puzzle to myself; and I see clearly what every one about me thinks, and I know it is not true. People fancy I have become quite good and religious; but if it were not for you, Susan, and just one or two others, I suspect I should very often have no faith in goodness at all."

Susan showed by her countenance that she was shocked, but she would not say so. Helen went on in a wild, eager way, giving vent to the thoughts which oppressed her. "Teaching does nothing, Susan; practice is everything; and all the practice I have seen, except yours, and Aunt Fanny's, and—and—Claude's, ——" she paused, and Susan listened more attentively,— "it has all been pretence,—all that church-going and formalism. Madame Reinhard taught me to see that, if she taught me nothing else."

"But Madame Reinhard could not understand it," exclaimed Susan.

"Yes, indeed ; she may have been false in her conduct, but her intellect was as clear and piercing as the sun."

"Intellect has nothing to do with the matter," said Susan. "It is a spiritual insight which is required to discern spiritual truths. I don't mean to talk cant, but it is the only way I can express myself. An irreligious person cannot possibly comprehend the use or comfort of religious practices."

"Madame Reinhard may have been very deceptive," said Helen, "but I am convinced she had a great deal of devotional feeling."

"Only it did not embody itself in deeds," said Susan; "and what was it worth?"

"I can't say; I don't know what anything is worth," said Helen, despairingly.

"It is all worth nothing, dearest," replied Susan, as she drew near to her cousin, and laid her hand fondly upon her shoulder. "I quite agree with you that all the church-going and formalism, as you call it, are, in themselves, just as good for nothing as Madame Reinhard's devotion, and just as incomprehensible; but I would not for that reason cast them aside, any more than I would cry down religious feelings. It is absurd to talk of either as religion; but they may be great helps; they are means to an end. Like crutches, they are not the power of motion; yet, if the leg is weak, the power will not be sufficient without the crutches."

"People think they are more than crutches," said Helen. "Poor mamma piqued herself upon her church-going, as if it had embodied all the cardinal virtues; and I should soon fall into the same tone of mind myself,—I know I should. I can't be happy unless I have done a certain set of things for mamma in the course of the day,—looking after her crochet—preparing her breakfast,—all those little matters; but I am not one whit more kind and dutiful, really."

"But if you knew that Lady Augusta loved you very much, that would make a difference," said Susan.

"Yes, an immense difference,"—and Helen's eyes sparkled; "but she can't do that: I have been such a trouble to her."

"I suppose, if we believe the Bible, we must believe also that God loves us," said Susan, "in spite of our being what you call a trouble."

"I can't believe it," said Helen.

"But you can believe that He is more pleased with you when you try to do what is right than when you wilfully do wrong," said Susan.

"Yes, I suppose I can; I must." Helen spoke doubtfully.

"That will help you in a degree," said Susan; "it will take away the hard feeling from your duties."

"If it were not for all those mazes, those dreamy notions of Madame Reinhard's!" said Helen; "I used to think at the time that I did not care for them; but they return now, whenever anything like comfort comes to me, and throw me into such a whirl of doubt! and then I think, and think, till I am half wild."

"Thinking won't help you," said Susan

"I know that; nothing will, unless—— Susan, I wish you would tell me about yourself; I should understand then."

"I can't talk of myself," was Susan's reply; and she turned away, and walked to the other end of the room. In another moment, however, she came back again, and said, "I don't mean to be unkind, Helen; but it is so different with me from what it is with you; and I have never been accustomed to analyse my own feelings. I don't know quite what I feel, or why I do things; only"—and her voice trembled—"I think I know what it is to love." After an instant she went on more composedly. "I can't tell how that feeling grew up. You know religion has always been part

of our lives; it was mixed up with our idea of mamma: when we loved her, we could not help loving what she did; and so it came to us without any effort; and what you call formalisms were as natural to us as getting up in the morning, and going to bed, and eating and drinking. Perhaps the first thing that presented itself to me distinctly, as a feeling of religion, was that one which I mentioned just now, —I mean, that God would be pleased with me if I tried to do right. I had it when I was a very little child, even before I could understand all that has been done for us. It was the first thought that came home to me personally, and that, I dare say, is the reason why I dwell so much upon it. Of course people may say that it is not the ground of our love, and I know it is not; but I am sure, as regards myself, that it was a long time before I could realize the higher feeling of love to our Saviour for His sufferings,—that grows deeper and clearer as one goes on; but at first it is very difficult to enter into it."

"Very," said Helen.

"I dare say the fact is," continued Susan, "that religion comes to people in different ways, according to their different circumstances: in one way to a child, and in another to a grown up person. I always feel as if my religion was that of a child; it is so much quieter than what I have heard of in persons who have been, what is called, converted late in life. But I should not like to change,—I mean, it would not suit me."

"Quietness is what I like," said Helen. "The odd ways people have of being religious, disturb me."

"We must take people as they are," said Susan; "we can be no more alike in our religious tastes, I suppose, than we are in any other; but I am glad to put all external differences aside, and think of what persons are underneath. If they are in earnest, I can like and esteem them, in spite of their *peculiar ways*."

"Yes, if they are in earnest," said Helen; "but that is what I am always doubting."

"Well, suppose we don't think about others, but about ourselves."

"About myself," said Helen; "that is the point. What is to help me to be anything but a cold-hearted wretch?"

Susan kissed her, and answered, "The knowledge that you are not one; that God does not look upon you as one, any more than I do; that He has made you very sorry for anything that may have been wrong before, and given you a hearty wish to do right now."

"I don't know; I can't say that I am very sorry, or that I have a hearty wish," said Helen.

"But, without saying it, only go on trying to please God, because He made you His child at your baptism; and though you may have been a very naughty child, you wish now to be a very good one."

"And think that He loves me in spite of it all," said Helen; "that is harder than anything."

"You don't like to have texts quoted," said Susan; "but I may just show you one;" and she turned to her Bible, and pointed to the eighth verse of the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "'God commendeth His love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' There is nothing to be said against that argument."

"No," said Helen, thoughtfully. She took the Bible from Susan's hand, and stood for some seconds reading it. Then laying it down suddenly, she exclaimed, in her usual light tone, "Susan, do you know where we are?"

"In Italy," said Susan.

"Capo di Ponte; a little out of the way village in Friuli. I don't quite believe it."

"One carries oneself everywhere," said Susan, with a *sigh*.

"People think that when they travel they shall forget their former selves," said Helen; "but they don't, at least I don't. The surface may change, but the substratum is the same. It is very odd, though, that you and I should choose to talk on these grave matters, at Capo di Ponte."

"Very odd!" said Susan; "only Capo di Ponte is on earth, and whilst we live on earth I suppose we must perplex ourselves about matters of earthly conduct."

"Somehow, I never realised before that Italy was earth," said Helen. "But good-night; I am not going to talk any more."

Helen fell asleep quickly. Susan had a long, restless, wakeful night, full of dreams of Claude Egerton; but there was no longer the dread that her dreams were wicked.

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## CHAPTER LXXI.

"TREVISO to-day, Venice to-morrow, Susan," exclaimed Helen, as she stood by the side of her cousin's bed, at six o'clock in the morning.

Susan half opened her very drowsy eyes.

"Very comfortable beds, in spite of our chambermaid's apology," continued Helen. "Did you hear her say last night that they had not been accustomed to wait upon ladies?"

"I don't remember anything now," said Susan; "only that I should like to go to sleep again for another hour."

"Here comes Annette, to frighten us," said Helen; "you had better get up directly, Susan, or you will have a lecture."

Annette entered as brisk as though she had condensed two nights' rest into one. "Miladi much better this morn-

ing, wishing to set off very early. *Depechez vous, mademoiselle.* Sir Henry moves about already. Miss Graham! you have not a moment."

"Well, then, just leave poor Miss Graham to herself, and come to me, Annette," said Helen. "What kind of night has mamma had?"

Annette's attention was happily withdrawn from Susan, who was left at liberty to dress; but quietness was not to be had. Helen required her services, and talk she would and must, about all things, and all places, and people; most especially, this morning, about Mr. Egerton. She had learnt more about him than he had told of himself. Captain Hume's man-servant had gossiped a good deal. "Mr. Egerton," she said, "had settled to go abroad quite suddenly. He had been overworking himself, and wanted change, and his spirits were not good. He was exceedingly kind to Captain Hume's invalid son, who had taken a great fancy to him, and that was one reason of his coming. Just before he left England there was a report that Mr. Egerton was going to be married, but Captain Hume's man didn't believe it." Annette was stopped short in the middle of her communication by an exclamation from Helen, that a hair-pin was running into her head.

"That will do, Annette; thank you; now you may go. Mamma will be waiting for you."

"Miss Graham, you want help. What can I do?" said Annette, advancing to the corner to which Susan had retired.

"Nothing, thank you, nothing." Susan's tone bordered upon irritation.

"*Pardon, pardon,* only you be ready in time. Miladi is very much disturbed when she is kept; and Sir Henry, he does not like it. Shall I put these shoes in your carpet bag?"

"Thank you, no. I can do it all myself. I don't want

any help; I can do quite well," persisted Susan, retiring further into the corner.

"Young ladies like their own way, but you be ready, mind. Mademoiselle,"—she turned to Helen,—“where is your dressing-case? I put it up, and take it separate to Pietro. Mr. Egerton's carriage is a better one than ours; he puts things all comfortable. See,” and she stood deliberately by the little dressing-table—“let this be the carriage; there is a pocket here, a pocket there ——”

Susan sat down, her hands on her lap.

“Annette, Annette, go!” exclaimed Helen, and she burst into a fit of laughter; “you will drive poor Miss Graham out of her senses.”

“*Moi! qu'ai je fait? pourquoi?* You much better let me do your hair;” and she advanced again to Susan.

“Thank you, no, not on any account;” and Susan raised her hands to her head, to keep off the proposed assistance.

A thundering knock was heard at the door, and Sir Henry's voice, “Helen, Susan, why do you keep Annette? Lady Augusta wants her.”

“*Ah! pauvre Miladi!*” Annette hurried out of the room, and Helen turned to Susan. “An enemy for life, Susan. She will forgive you anything but getting up into the corner in that fashion, and refusing to talk to her.”

“I must run the risk,” replied Susan. “It does try one beyond patience to have that French chattering going on the first thing in the morning.”

“And such things as she tells!” said Helen. “I wish——” she stopped herself.

“What do you wish?”

“Nothing, nothing. I don't think, any more than Captain Hume's man-servant, that Claude Egerton is going to be married;” and almost involuntarily, Helen bent down and kissed her cousin's forehead.



They finished dressing in silence. Helen went to make breakfast. Susan remained to pack the carpet bag, and was just collecting the few things to be put into it, when the door opened suddenly, and in rushed the black-haired waiter, with a grimace and a smile. *Perdona signorina, perdona;*" he made his way past Susan, unfastened a cupboard, caught up some wine-glasses, and was gone before Susan had time to laugh. Annette followed. "Ah! you so late! no wonder the garçon should come in. What can you expect?" She motioned Susan, with an air of offended majesty, to leave the carpet bag, and would accept no apology for trouble. "Miladi ready, Sir Henry ready, and every one; only Miss Graham, she will always be last;" and the assertion was made so authoritatively, that poor Susan began to believe it must be true.

Straight level roads, bordered by acacias, gently rounded hills, and luxuriant vineyards, form a very agreeable country for a rapid and easy drive, but they are not very interesting nor picturesque. Lady Augusta and Annette were the only persons of the party who seemed to enjoy the change from the mountains. Helen complained openly, and was only comforted by the deliciously clear warmth of the climate. She would scarcely, indeed, acknowledge that there was any interest in the tiny lakes of Santa Croce, and the Lago Morto; the latter a most singular little sheet of water, shut in by high cliffs, and so still, as fully to deserve its name; and was only roused to excitement when they entered Sarravalle, the first Italian town which they had reached. Here, indeed, infinite amusement was to be found in the streets, which, from its being a festival day, were full of people. The quaint costumes, painted houses, arcades, and innumerable fruit stalls, made a mixture of gaiety and business, which seemed to please even Lady Augusta, and Sir Henry rubbed his hands with genuine satisfaction, as he

muttered to Susan: "It will do after all; Markham was right. Italy is the place. I begin to say with Annette: *les montagnes et les vilains rochers, que j'e les deteste!*"

"We are to dine at Conegliano, I believe, papa, are n't we?" said Helen.

Sir Henry had recourse to Murray. "Conegliano,—plains of the Piave,—Post, as usual,—frescoes by Pordenone, on private houses. Altar-piece in the Duomo, by Cima, cracked, blackened, and ruined! Great comfort that! for we need n't trouble ourselves to go and look at it."

"I think I could walk a little, and go to the shops," said Lady Augusta, speaking with some energy. "Annette would go with me."

"I would go—we would all go, mamma," exclaimed Helen, and her face lighted up with a smile of relief and satisfaction, but disappointment followed almost instantly. Lady Augusta said decidedly, she did not want any one but Annette, and Helen sank back in the corner of the carriage, and did not speak again till they entered Conegliano.

"As good as Saravalle, I declare," said Sir Henry. "Look, my dear;" and he drew Lady Augusta's attention to the arcades and fruit stalls. "We will just order dinner, and then you and Annette can walk about a little, and if you like, buy us some figs to carry on with us this afternoon. Helen, and Susan, and I, will go further to see what the place is like."

Lady Augusta seemed pleased at the idea of a commission, and Sir Henry handed her out of the carriage, and called to Annette to take care of her, and hurried into the hotel, to inquire about a salon and order dinner.

Helen lingered sadly behind. "It is no use," she said to Susan; "I may as well give it up. Even papa won't acknowledge that I can do anything for her."

"I should persevere," said Susan; "things may change by

and by; one never knows; and I would not let Annette take the upper hand. Now, I would insist upon seeing that the salon is comfortable, and that Lady Augusta rests for a few minutes before going out."

Susan turned round, and saw Annette close behind her. She had left Lady Augusta in the salon, and was returned to look after a bag that was wanted.

Her countenance was anything but amiable. "Madoiselle, Miss Graham, Sir Henry will be coming down directly. Miladi goes out with me; she is quite comfortable, quite." Annette placed herself in the way, so as almost to prevent Helen from passing.

"Thank you, Annette; I wish to go to the salon, myself, and see how mamma is," was Helen's resolute answer; and Annette drew back, murmuring to herself, and casting threatening glances at Susan, as she followed her cousin up the stairs.

Lady Augusta, changeable as the wind, had given up her momentary wish to walk, and was willing now to sit by the window, and look out into the streets. "She liked Conegliano," she said; "there was something going on to amuse her. She did not want her crochet."

"And if you and I stay here together, mamma," said Helen, "papa and Susan can take their walk, and Annette can go out and buy the fruit."

"No reason for that, my dear," said Sir Henry; "you will miss a good deal; there's an upper town to be seen, a curious place enough, from what I can make out. You had better come with us, and leave your mamma. Annette understands her better than you do."

"Annette must go and get the fruit," said Lady Augusta, a little petulantly. "If Helen likes to stay, she can."

"Like it," muttered Sir Henry, "she does n't like it, but she's always sacrificing herself." He was evidently disconcerted.

"You won't be gone long, I hope," continued Lady Augusta. "Dinner will be ready. I think you had better all wait till afterwards."

Sir Henry appealed to Susan. "We had better be off, Susan. If we wait, we shan't go at all. Helen, I can't let this kind of thing go on."

But Helen was contented, and a smile passed over her features, as she nodded to her father and cousin, and said, "Good-bye for the present; you must tell me all you see." Susan was satisfied then that the choice was an honest one.

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## CHAPTER LXXII.

SIR HENRY and Susan wandered leisurely up a steep hill to the upper town, the original Conegliano, enclosed within walls, and containing the Duomo, and a castle. The picturesqueness of the place was to be found here, the ornamental stonework of the old houses, and the half-defaced frescoes with which they were ornamented, giving an air of quaintness and beauty of colouring to the narrow streets. Susan longed to stop and sketch every instant, and Sir Henry was loud and constant in his regrets that he had been foolish enough to give in to Helen's whim, and had not insisted upon her accompanying them.

"These old towns of northern Italy are quite to themselves, Susan; we shan't see their like elsewhere, and Helen may never have the opportunity of coming abroad again. She will be married, I dare say, before long, and then there will be claims enough to keep her in England. See the world while you are young, for you may never live to be old, is the wise motto. I wish I had insisted. I wish to my heart I had. Just look across to the opposite side, now ;

where will you see anything like that carved stone-work? and the arcades below; I wonder whether Lady Augusta would have come if I had suggested it? we could have driven up." Sir Henry was becoming quite excited, wandering along, and dragging Susan with him, in spite of her entreaties to be allowed to stop.

"No time, my dear, no time; dinner will be ready. We must look into the Duomo, just to say we have seen it. Here's a curious place!" and he peeped into a large court-yard, partially filled with tubs and carts, but bearing traces of exquisite ornament in the stone-work of the side walls and the roof.

"The hall of a house it must have been," continued Sir Henry. He made his way in, and Susan followed, a little frightened at the thought of trespassing, but considerably interested.

"Yes, the hall of a house, and now used as a warehouse; and look, there are some steps leading to upper rooms. But we mustn't stay—we have no time. On to the Duomo, Susan."

"I don't care for the Duomo," replied Susan. "Murray would have told us if there had been anything worth seeing there. I would much rather stay and sketch some little bits of this carving, if I might. I am sure I should find some which would do."

"You can't stay alone," said Sir Henry.

"Oh! yes, here; no one will see me. Please let me stay, and you can just walk on to the Duomo, and come back and tell me whether there is anything worth seeing in it. It is quite close."

Sir Henry hesitated, went out into the street to be quite sure that the Duomo really was very close, came back again, and found Susan already prepared with her sketch-book and pencil; and telling her he gave her only five minutes, left her alone.

But it was not so easy as Susan had expected to find what would do for sketching, and especially as she wished to place herself so that she might be screened from the observation of any one in the street. She examined the building more carefully. From the outer court there was an opening into another, heaped up with dirt and rubbish, yet having a beautiful carved and covered gallery built round it, and broken stone statues lying on the ground. The place must once, she saw, have been of considerable grandeur; perhaps it was a palace. Her attention was directed again to the flight of steps in the outer court, and a longing seized her to explore the rooms to which they led. She stood hesitating whether she should venture, and afraid of being missed by Sir Henry, when the sound of loud English voices disturbed her. It was a curious feeling, which made her much more nervous than if they had been Italian. English people, unless they are previously acquainted, have an instinctive dislike to meeting each other abroad; and when the party entered the court, Susan, not very wisely, hurried up the stairs. They terminated in a passage, the floor of which looked like marble, and passing along this she found herself in a large, and what must once have been a very handsome room, hung with tattered paintings of men in armour, princes and nobles, with their titles written beneath, but bearing names unknown in the marked events of general history. Great and powerful, however, they must doubtless have been in their day; each grim, torn portrait having its tale of earthly distinction, now past and forgotten; whilst the phantom forms connected with them, stood forth mockingly in their own halls, preaching eloquently of the nothingness of human greatness, by the very means intended to perpetuate its memory.

It was a startling sensation which came upon Susan, when she entered thus, unannounced, into the presence of these

forgotten nobles. The first emotion was awe, the second, shame at having intruded; she looked round for some one to whom she might apologise; but she was alone with the silent figures. Without, in the street, there was life, and mirth, and business; below, she could catch the sound or men's voices, speculating and curious, doubtless, like herself; but there was no one to tell her where she was, or with whom. The hall was the only part of the palace apparently remaining, with the exception of one small room beyond, the ceiling of which was painted. She was lingering in the hall, feeling unwilling to leave it, and looking upon it as a discovered treasure of her own, when the English voices were heard at the foot of the steps. Susan might have been uncomfortable, but that the first which was recognised was that of Sir Henry Clare.

"Up here, Hume. Where won't a woman's curiosity lead her? Susan, child." Susan, rather ashamed of herself, appeared at the head of the stairs.

"What did you think I was to do when you hid yourself? I should have given you credit for more sense. We have stumbled upon our friends again. Captain Hume, Mr. George Hume,—my niece, Miss Graham. What have you found here, Susan? Anything worth looking at?"

Sir Henry made his way into the hall; Susan kept rather aloof. "A curious place, a very curious place!" muttered Sir Henry, and he had recourse to Murray; whilst Captain Hume, and his intelligent but sickly-looking son, were reading the names at the foot of the pictures, and trying to ransack their memories for history which had never had a place there.

"Monstrously ignorant every one is," said Sir Henry. "Susan, you must know something about it; you haven't left school so long as we have."

Susan did not hear; she was resting against the doorway looking out into the passage.

"Where is Egerton? He is sure to know, or to find out," said Sir Henry.

"We left him in the court below," replied Captain Hume. "He always sets to work methodically when he is lionising."

"Hark! he is talking," said Sir Henry, going out into the passage, and listening: "he has found some one to give him a little information. We'll have him up."

He went to the top of the stairs, put his foot on the first step, stumbled over a loose stone, and fell to the bottom.

Susan, Claude, Captain Hume and his son, were collected together in an instant. Sir Henry had hurt himself; there was no doubt of that, for his face expressed great pain; but he would scarcely allow it. "It was a mere nothing," he said; "just a slip, that was all;" and he took hold of Claude's hand, and tried to stand up; but his ankle was in some way twisted, and his back bruised, and he was obliged to sit down.

"I had better go back to the hotel for the carriage," said Susan, in the quiet voice which was her characteristic when at all nervous or agitated.

"No, no," exclaimed Claude, "I will go; I must;" and he would have hurried away, but he was stopped by a faint entreaty from Sir Henry.

"Let her go, Claude; she will manage best. Poor Lady Augusta will be frightened, else. Let her go."

"And I may go too, I suppose," said Claude, eagerly.

"Yes, yes; be quick," exclaimed Captain Hume. "Miss Graham, do you happen to have salts or eau de Cologne with you?" He rested Sir Henry's head against his knee; the pain was so great as to cause a sensation of faintness; yet Sir Henry laughed still, and declared he knew quite well what was the matter. A sprained ankle! That was all.

Susan looked at him with some anxiety.

"Nothing amiss, child. Don't put on such a long face. I shall be walking after you if you don't make haste."



Claude hurried her away.

They walked on in silence for some distance through the bustling arcades. Susan did not notice them now. A crowd of perplexing possibilities were presenting themselves; but they excited instead of depressing her; she felt able to battle with them all.

Claude broke the silence. "I am thankful we were there, but I don't believe there is much the matter; you must not be uneasy."

"I care most for Lady Augusta," said Susan. "She is so soon made ill by over-excitement; but Helen will help to keep her quiet."

"Is Helen with Lady Augusta now?" asked Claude.

He said Helen quite naturally again. That stiff, uncomfortable notion of the necessity of talking of her as Miss Clare seemed to have passed away.

"Helen fancied she might please Lady Augusta by staying with her. She thinks of that the first thing always." Susan spoke very earnestly; a sense of justice impelled her. Helen doubtless ought to be restored to Claude's good opinion. She would have said the same, indeed, under any circumstances; but it demanded no effort now. There was no room for jealousy. Helen herself had contributed to remove any such feeling. The tone in which she spoke of Claude, the quiet way in which, when his name was mentioned, she assumed that his goings and comings, his actions and words, were indifferent to her—all tended to separate him from her in thought.

Susan's present anxiety was that he should think well enough of her; and that if they must meet, it should be on friendly and comfortable terms. She felt for them both.

It was a quick hot walk; weary, and anxious, and little was said, and that little of small importance; but Susan could have gone much farther, and scarcely have felt inclined to stop.

Annette met them as they were about to enter the inn, tired, laden with purchases, and, as a consequence, out of humour. She began an expostulation, even before Susan had time to speak.

"Miss Graham! dinner will be cold. *Pardon Monsieur Egerton*, I did not know what made Miss Graham so late." Her angry meaning tone roused Claude's indignation, and excited Susan's surprise. They both passed on without entering upon any explanation, but Susan stopped as they were half way up the stairs, and said: "We had better take her into our counsels, it is the only way of keeping the peace. Annette!"

Annette came very slowly up the stairs, under the pretence that she was too exhausted to move more quickly.

Susan went down to meet her, and spoke in a confidential tone. "Poor Sir Henry has fallen down and hurt his foot, Annette. He is in the Upper Town, and he wants to have the carriage sent there for him. How shall we break the news to Lady Augusta?"

"Sir Henry fallen! his leg broke! he not be able to move. *Ah! quel malheur!*" And Annette began to wring her hands, and bewail so loudly, that the waiters gathered at the foot of the stairs to hear the news.

"*Quel malheur! quel malheur! Pauvre Miladi!*" screamed Annette.

Claude turned round sharply. "Silence Annette; don't make a fool of yourself. If you can't do better than that, leave Lady Augusta to us."

"*Non! non!* you not understand at all; you not go to her." Annette rushed passed Claude and Susan, and placed herself before the door of the salon. "Monsieur Egerton, you order the carriage,—Miladi will go into the fit; she will not bear a stranger. Miss Graham, you come with me."

Susan could scarcely refrain from a smile. There was

something so indescribably ludicrous in the instinct which both she and Claude had to obey Annette's orders.

The smile was unfortunately seen, and it increased Annette's indignation. She motioned to Claude to go, but would not condescend to speak again; and seeing that it was really the best thing to be done, he said quietly to Susan, "I shall give the order, and then come back to see how Lady Augusta is;" and ran down stairs.

Annette stood for an instant facing Susan. "Ah! young ladies! they know best what they are at," she muttered, half aloud. "Captain Hume's man, he say that Monsieur Egerton is soon taken in."

Happily Susan did not hear. She was as unconscious of Annette's suspicions, as she was of having excited more than a momentary annoyance.

Claude proceeded to the courtyard of the hotel with a feeling of fretful irritation, conscious of having been made a subject of impertinent observation, which yet it was beneath him to notice. His only hope was that Susan, in her simplicity, did not understand, or that, if she did, she would not care. That self-restrained, composed manner of hers, certainly put him very much at his ease with her, and it was so far dangerous that it led him to treat her in a way which might be open to observation. They were on those comfortable brother and sister terms which the world could not possibly be supposed to understand; and Claude, who always faced disagreeables manfully, at once made up his mind that he would be more prudent for the future, even if prudence destroyed the pleasure and freedom of their intercourse. Happily, they were not likely to be together very much, and perhaps it would be wiser under the circumstances for him to keep to the plan of going with Captain Hume to Milan, and leaving Venice for the present. There was a pang, a sharp, sharp pang, as the resolution was made; Claude

thought that it was caused by the feeling of loneliness, the knowledge that his going to either place was a matter of no real moment to any one.

He knocked at the door of the salon again, and was told by Susan to come in. Lady Augusta was in tears, almost hysterics. The intelligence of the accident had been communicated in the gentlest way, but it had completely upset her. Annette was bustling about looking for sal volatile, and asking the Italian for camphor-julap, and red lavender; Susan was trying to keep her quiet by following her and talking in an under tone; whilst Helen knelt by Lady Augusta, holding her hands, and endeavoring, by every soothing, caressing tone and word, to tranquillise her.

"Claude! you are come. I am so thankful," murmured Lady Augusta; "you will tell us the worst. Helen, ask him to tell me at once; I can't wait."

Claude read great anxiety in Helen's eyes; but she only said, without looking at him, "It is but a slight accident, dear mamma; Susan was there, and knows all about it."

"But Claude—why won't he speak? He keeps every thing from me," said Lady Augusta.

"You had better tell her," said Helen; and she rose up and gave her place to Claude, and stood behind Lady Augusta, bathing her forehead with eau de Cologne, and every now and then whispering, "You are better now, dear mamma, and so we are all; it was only a slight accident."

Claude told what had happened in few words; but even before he had quite finished, Pietro sent word that the carriage was ready.

"Annette wants to go," whispered Susan, coming up to Helen; "she fancies nothing can be done without her."

Lady Augusta caught the words. "Yes, Annette had better go. Some one must go with Claude."

Claude suggested that there was nothing to be done, and

that he should be quite sufficient; but poor Lady Augusta, all the more excitable and unreasonable because she was perfectly powerless, could not be pacified.

"It can't be," said Claude, aside to Susan; "that noisy woman would drive any man in pain out of his senses."

Helen left her place by the sofa, and came forward. "I am going," she said; "papa would rather have me than any one else. Good bye, mamma;" and she kissed Lady Augusta: "we shall bring him back in a very few minutes, and it will be all well."

She fastened her bonnet strings, hastily adjusted her mantilla, and saying to Claude, "Now, if you please, I am quite ready," led the way downstairs, without giving any one the opportunity of objecting.

A short silent drive that was to the foot of the steep hill. Neither Claude nor Helen spoke: when they began to ascend, Claude got out of the carriage and walked; and when they reached the courtyard of the deserted palace, he merely said that he would go in first, and left her sitting in the carriage. It was Captain Hume who came out to tell her that Sir Henry was better, and that she need not be uneasy, and begged her now she was there to look at the building;—Captain Hume who advised her how to place the cushions and pillows she had brought,—and Captain Hume who, when Sir Henry was lifted into the carriage, and Helen seated by him, took the vacant place.

Claude said nothing, did nothing, seemed to care for nothing, except what common kindness for Sir Henry demanded.

Poor Helen! It was a bitter experience, but she felt that she had deserved it.

## CHAPTER LXXIII.

A CABINET council was held when dinner was ended. Sir Henry had managed to eat in spite of the pain he was suffering, and that was sufficient evidence of the injury not being serious, to satisfy even Lady Augusta for a time. But when the question of movement was mooted, all her fears revived.

Sir Henry was bent upon proceeding. He had no notion he said, of keeping them all cooped up in an out-of-the-way town like Conegliano, when they were within a day's journey of Venice. If he must have rest, he would have it there. It was only the right foot which was really hurt, and he could easily get to the carriage without putting it to the ground, and when once there, he could rest it just as well as if he were lying on a sofa. As for his back, he would not allow that it was injured at all, though whenever he attempted to move he winced with pain. He argued, as persons who have anything the matter with them generally do, in the most foolish and irrational way, simply in accordance with his own wishes; and as there was no one to control him, there was nothing to be done but to yield.

"That is settled, then," exclaimed Sir Henry, when at length he had silenced opposition; "so we start forthwith. Claude, my dear fellow, when shall we see you again?"

Claude had been standing a little apart, having soon given up the attempt of bringing Sir Henry to reason. He came forward now, and replied rather coldly, that it was impossible to say; all depended upon the letters which Captain Hume might find at Treviso.

"Claude," said Lady Augusta plaintively, "he is not going to leave us. We can't get on at all without him. We can't talk to Pietro; we can't do anything."

"I have not lost the use of my tongue, my dear," said Sir Henry, impatiently; "not that we should n't be very glad to have Claude with us; very glad, indeed," he added, trying to move so as to face Claude.

Claude hesitated to reply, and looked at Captain Hume for his opinion. But immediately afterwards his eye wandered to the corner of the sofa, near which Helen was seated: Susan was just behind her, and the sight of her seemed to settle his resolution as he said, "I am afraid I could not disarrange Captain Hume's plans."

"Don't think of me," said Captain Hume, bluntly, but good-naturedly. "George and I shall do very well together, and it may be only for a few days; we shall join you at Venice, probably, before Sir Henry is able to leave it."

"I don't see what we are to do," said Lady Augusta, almost crying. "If we could only stay here! It is very pleasant to look out into the streets. I like Conegliano. If Sir Henry would only let me stay! but he always will go on."

"To be sure, my dear. There's a gondola waiting for you at Venice," said Sir Henry, in the tone which he would have used in speaking to a spoilt child. "Don't fear for us, Claude; don't put yourself out of your way; I wouldn't have you do so on any account. Helen, just look into the next room for Annette, and tell her to order the carriage in a quarter of an hour. You go on with us to Treviso to night?" he added, addressing Captain Hume.

"Why, no; at least not according to our original plans. You see we have had a longer day's journey than you; we came from Longarone this morning, and started unusually early; and to tell the truth, I think my boy has had enough of it. We talked of staying here to-night and having a rest for some hours, and perhaps strolling a little about the town in the evening, and making our way quietly on to Treviso to-morrow."

The announcement evidently gave Sir Henry a blank, uncomfortable feeling: he said nothing.

"I don't see why we shouldn't all stay," observed Lady Augusta. "We can't go without Claude. Who is to order dinner and look to our luggage? and who can help you, Sir Henry? and what are Helen and Susan to do? I think it very unkind. I can't go." And her face flushed, whilst her voice was raised to a high, harsh pitch.

"We must go," said Sir Henry, shortly. "We have written to secure beds at Treviso, and Sir John Hume has ordered rooms for us at Danieli's when we get to Venice, and our letters are all to be ready for us: we must go on."

Lady Augusta began to cry.

"The young ladies give no opinion," observed Captain Hume, trying to say something which would put every one at ease.

"I think it would be a comfort if Claude could go with us to Treviso to-night," answered Helen. She held Lady Augusta's hand whilst she was speaking, and Claude saw a tear drop from her eye.

He was decided at once; he did not even remark that Susan said nothing.

"Yes; that cuts the Gordian knot: thank you. Dear Lady Augusta, I will go with you to-night. Hume, if I don't wait for you at Treviso to-morrow, I will leave a note to tell you why."

"Come, Susan," said Helen, touching her cousin's arm; "we shall be late if we don't put on our bonnets."

"Susan is in a dream," said Sir Henry; "thinking of the deserted palace, the 'Count of Mont Alba's,' as a man told us while we were waiting there."

"Very unlike Miss Graham," said Claude. "She is present, not absent, generally, when anything is to be done." And at the sound of his voice, Susan was so painfully pre-



ent and coloured so deeply, that Helen came to her rescue, and remarking lightly that personal observations, whether good, bad, or indifferent, were never allowable, drew her into the adjoining room.

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## CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE deserted palace was recalled to the recollection of all who had seen it, by the drive to Treviso. Handsome houses standing by the roadside, empty and decaying, gave an air of departed grandeur to the country, which imparted a feeling of melancholy, in spite of the delicious sensation of the climate, and the easy pace at which the carriage passed over the broad, smooth, and well kept road, as usual bordered with acacia trees.

Sir Henry made an effort to talk at first, but gave it up after a time; and Helen was sure, although he would not acknowledge it, that the motion of the carriage was trying to his back. Claude had taken possession of a small, uncomfortable, back seat, intended usually for Annette, but which she always declined, preferring the company of Pietro on the box. He was therefore quite out of reach of conversation; and as Lady Augusta soon fell asleep, and Helen and Susan, when tired of the acacia trees, both began to read, the drive was silent and dull. It was late when they reached Treviso; a circumstance which provoked Sir Henry, who had been consoling himself for having seen nothing on the road, by the prospect of amusement in the town. "The chief city of a province,—the residence of a bishop,—a manufacturing place too, with eighteen thousand inhabitants, quite a marvel for Italy! it was too tiresome to come in so late, and only to

have a glimpse of narrow streets and arcades, like Conegliano and Sarravalle, and to be off again the next morning."

The thought of finding a good hotel rather consoled him; but here again there was disappointment. The rooms were large, but unquestionably dirty; and with all the delight which Italy must inspire, there is no question that dirt is as much a part of its nature as warmth. Carpets in bedrooms may be comforts in a cold climate, but they are just the reverse in a hot one; and poor Lady Augusta, particular and sensitive to a fault, even at Ivors, looked with horror at the dingy covering spread upon the floor of her handsome apartment, and insisted upon it, that before she went to bed it should be rolled up and taken away, even at the risk of discovering the mountains of dust beneath, with which Annette threatened her.

Every one went to bed early; and Claude felt really thankful he had consented to come, when he found how helpless Sir Henry was, though still trying to keep up, and insisting that he should be perfectly well the next day. His back only wanted a night's rest, he said, and the Treviso beds were soft, if they were not very clean, so that he had no doubt of being able to sleep. He allowed Claude, however, to make inquiry for a chemist's shop, at which he might procure some laudanum, and took a small quantity, though laughing at the notion, and declaring that it was quite unnecessary. The next morning, however, brought a different tone. Whether from the effects of the laudanum or the fall, Sir Henry did not feel so well, and was disinclined to get up to breakfast. A consultation was held in his room with Claude and Pietro, and instead of starting in the morning, it was decided to wait till the afternoon. The drive to Mestre was not very long, and though the railway was not completed, a gondola would soon take them to Venice. And besides, one thing was quite clear to Claude now, that it would not

do to leave Sir Henry in his present state. It would be actually cruel to Helen and Susan, who were already beginning to look anxious; and even if the plan had been disagreeable, he would have been consoled for making it, by the change which came over Lady Augusta, when he announced his determination of giving up all thoughts of Milan, and proceeding with them to Venice, if Sir Henry should be well enough in the course of the day to move. She pressed his hand, and thanked him as though he had saved her from some fatal catastrophe; but neither Helen nor Susan expressed satisfaction, except that the former remarked, that anything which kept Lady Augusta's mind from working must be good. It seemed that she did not think it right to betray any feeling of her own, and imagined that it was not her place to do so; and she kept quite aloof from Claude, putting Susan forward on every occasion. His being with them certainly did not raise her spirits, however it might relieve her from anxiety.

They went into the town after breakfast. Lady Augusta seemed so comforted by Claude's presence, that she consented to take a carriage, and drive to the cathedral; and whilst it was getting ready, she begged Claude to take Helen and Susan into the market, which was held in the square immediately in front of the hotel. She, as usual, stationed herself at the window, with Annette by her side, commenting in French upon all that was going on below.

There was a strange medley: birds, bread, coloured cloth, handkerchiefs, macaroni, fruit, fish, flowers, shoes and boots, both old and new, were all displayed upon the stalls; and in and out amongst them passed crowds of men and women; the latter wearing large straw hats, but otherwise having a less peculiar dress than the Tyrolese. Eating seemed as much a part of the business of the day as buying and selling: chestnuts boiled in pots, set over little pans of charcoal, and slices from hot cakes, made of Indian corn, and

looking very like gourds, being the favourite delicacies. The long arcades in the streets were full of bustle also ; but the square was the chief attraction, and Helen acknowledged to Susan that, if she were allowed her choice, she thought she should prefer staying there, if Annette could be with her, and trying to sketch rather than going to the cathedral.

Claude began a sentence which sounded as though he intended to offer to stay also ; but Helen interrupted him before it was finished, by saying in a very quiet tone, that she could not allow Lady Augusta to drive about without her.

" I would take great care of her," said Susan, whilst unconsciously at the same moment a change came over her face, which showed that she did not enter into the idea.

" Thank you ; I know you would. But she was pleased with my being with her yesterday, and I would rather not leave her to-day."

And so they drove to the cathedral, a handsome but unfinished building, with five domes ; and Lady Augusta sat in the carriage whilst the rest went in, and looked at Porde-none's ruined frescos, and tried to admire a Titian over the high altar, and studied a curious old picture, representing a procession of the authorities of the town ; and at last stole apart from each other to enjoy the building alone, till Helen suggested that Lady Augusta would be tired.

" Pictures are thrown away in a church," said Claude, as he seated himself in the carriage, and told the driver to take them to San Nicolo ; " at least, that is the conclusion I have arrived at. Perhaps one over the altar may be an exception, but even then, I doubt whether carving is not better. If they are good they draw one's attention from the effect of the building, and if they are bad they are simply disfigurements."

"If one could get over the feeling that it is one's duty to look at them, it would not signify," said Susan; "but whatever is mentioned in the Guide Book it seems part of one's travelling business to examine. After all, I suppose, we are great moral cowards in these matters. Shall we give up searching for pictures in churches for the future, Helen?"

Helen did not seem to understand that she was addressed; but when Susan repeated the question, she said, a little sadly, that she had not looked at the pictures in the cathedral; at least, she had not thought about them.

"You were with us," said Claude, quickly.

"Only just for the first few minutes; but you did not notice when I moved away."

Claude was silent; and a strange pang of pity, mingled with some other feeling, almost akin to satisfaction, was felt by Susan. It did seem that when she was near, Claude had no thought for any one else.

San Nicolo was ugly enough on the outside to induce Susan to propose that they should exercise their moral courage, and not trouble themselves to examine it; but Claude objected. It was the first specimen he had seen of the old brick buildings to be found in the north of Italy, and he was anxious to look at it more closely. Susan, yielding to his slightest suggestion, was out of the carriage before he was able to assist her; and owned herself repaid by the general effect of the interior, and struck by the peculiarity of seeing the great pillars in the aisle half covered with crimson cloth. Helen, as before, kept aloof, and not only when they were in the church, but afterwards as they drove round the town. She allowed Claude to continue a conversation with Susan without attempting to take part in it, and seemed only employed in pointing out to Lady Augusta all that was worth noticing; whilst Claude, safe from Annette's remarks, and

delighted to find some one who could share his tastes, entered *con amore* into the subject of the Lombard brick architecture, promising, as soon as they reached Venice, to show Susan some books upon the subject which he had brought with him.

They found Sir Henry better on their return; Claude acted the part of valet, and assisted him to dress. Sir Henry himself made many apologies for the trouble he gave, blaming himself for not having foreseen the possibility of an accident, and brought a servant, or a courier, or some one of mankind with him; an omission, he assured Claude, which was entirely owing to Annette, who was essential to Lady Augusta, and had quarrelled so grievously with the courier at Innsbruck that they had been obliged to leave him behind. "A woman at the bottom of the trouble!—always the case, Claude," he said, whilst Claude helped him to hop into the salon. "You remember the story of the Shah of Persia: when he was told that a workman had fallen from a ladder, he called out, 'Who is she? who is she?' 'Please your Majesty, 't is a he.' 'Nonsense, there's never an accident without a woman. Who is she?' The Shah was right, Claude; the man had fallen from his ladder because he was looking at a woman at a window. Many a man does that in other countries besides Persia."

They left Treviso early in the afternoon, Sir Henry grumbling at the dark salon in which they had dined, and giving vent to as much rage as his good-nature would allow at the terrific bill brought him by the landlord, whose only excuse was, that he had charged more because it was market-day!

No tidings had been heard of Captain Hume and his son; but Claude left a note, telling them why he found it impossible to leave Sir Henry, and urging them, if possible, to follow them to Venice.

## CHAPTER LXXV.

ANOTHER long dull drive to Mestre, of all places the most uninteresting. What situation could be more destitute of beauty, than the low, swampy levels bordering the narrow channel of the sea which separates Venice from the mainland? It requires every early historical association of Attila and his invading Huns, and the flight of the frightened Italians, and the wonderful rise of the fairy city from the islands bordered by the muddy Lagune, to give the slightest charm to the approach to Venice. Yet so strong is the power of imagination, that few probably can for the first time find themselves in a gondola, pushing off from the shore, and floating away between low flat banks, without a house, a tree, or even a fence in view, and not experience a sensation so new and bewildering, and yet so exciting, that it would not be exchanged for the delight of the most glorious scenery of the Alps.

"A gondola, my dear, you see," said Sir Henry to Lady Augusta, as they drove down to the waterside, and saw the long narrow boat, with a curved beak and sepulchral awning, drawn up alongside the quay.

Poor Lady Augusta was tired, and, as usual, inclined to be fretful. She could not see, she said, how they were all to get into the gondola, it was so small. And what would Sir Henry do with his lame leg?

"We must have two gondolas," said Claude, coming up to the side of the carriage—"one for Annette and the luggage, and the other for ourselves."

"Not quite room enough, I am afraid, even then," said Sir Henry, laughing, "considering that I go for two. Those ancient senators never travelled, I conclude, or they would

have provided some more convenient mode of transit for the bags and boxes."

"Well! then Annette and I will occupy the luggage-gondola," said Claude, good-naturedly.

But Lady Augusta would not hear of such a thing. She could not stir without Claude. "If the gondola should upset," she said, "what would Sir Henry do?"

Claude laughed heartily, which rather displeased Lady Augusta, but she still would not allow the possibility of going in a gondola without him. Susan was about to speak, when the question was set at rest by Helen, who pushed open the carriage door, jumped out, and going up to Annette, said, "Now, Annette, you and I must manage; we are to go together."

"*Ah! oui; mais, que ferons nous? Arrêtez-vous! où allez-vous?* where you taking that box?" and Annette caught hold of one of the host of porters and beggars who crowded the quay, and were seizing upon the luggage as Pietro took it off the carriage, conveying it away whither they did not take the trouble to tell.

Claude came to her assistance, and forbade any thing to be moved till he had given orders, telling Annette, at the same time, to stand by and guard it, whilst he placed Helen in the gondola.

"You solved our difficulty for us," he said, when they stood for a moment together on the quay; "but no one thanked you."

"I don't want thanks," was Helen's reply; "it was my place."

And Claude said no more.

A considerable time elapsed before Sir Henry and Lady Augusta, and the luggage, and, above all, Annette, could be properly disposed of. Without Claude's assistance it would have been almost a work of impossibility. Annette, good-



natured in general, was still never forgetful of herself ; and there was a certain basket, containing some secret valuables, which was not at once forthcoming when she looked for it in the luggage-gondola ; and not all Claude's assurances that everything had been put in, nor Helen's entreaties that she would not delay any longer, could induce her to move her foot from the quay till it was found. Fiercely she interrogated the unfortunate porters, and threatened the beggars, and scolded Mademoiselle, and cast scornful glances at Claude. They might have waited for her till midnight, she cared not ; Lady Augusta was dependent upon her, and they could not move without her.

"Never mind," said Claude, seeing Helen's distressed face, as Sir Henry raised his voice in towering indignation, whilst Lady Augusta began to cry, "we will go, and return for her." He made a sign to the gondoliers ; and Annette, seizing his arm, gave a bound, which drew a shout of laughter from the bystanders, and found her place in the gondola, and her basket under the seat.

"Off at last !" said Sir Henry, as the gondola was pushed away from the bank. "We are later than we ought to be ; but that we always are. Annette shall have a considerable rowing when we get back to Ivors ; we can't afford it now."

He looked round rather anxiously. The evening shades were deepening, and clouds were gathering in the sky, threatening a thunderstorm. No one replied to his observation. The stillness of the air and the gliding motion of the gondola, moving on seemingly without effort, had a subduing, solemnising effect upon the spirits of all. It seemed as though they were wandering forth on a voyage of discovery, propelled by some unknown power. There was neither the restless life of the ocean nor the firmness of the land to give power and energy to their movements ; but on they floated,

slumberingly, silently, as in search of some phantom city of rest, lying far off, amidst the shadows of night.

Another delay :—An Austrian government vessel was moored at the entrance of the narrow passage, and passports were demanded, and given up to be examined : and Lady Augusta fell fairly asleep, whilst the gondola waited beneath the dark vessel,—the light of some dim candles bringing out, in Rembrandt-like relief, the figures of the few soldiers on the deck.

But an end came at last. The passports were restored ; and again they glided on, away from the narrow banks, and across one of the many channels of the Adriatic, which open a way through the Lagune to the island city.

“ See,” said Claude,—he laid one hand involuntarily upon Susan’s, and with the other pointed to the horizon. A flash of lightning glanced from the dark clouds ; and, rising out of the water, a line of tall, misty buildings burst for one moment upon the sight, and then all was darkness again, and silence, and mystery, till the sound of bells, with a slow and heavy toll, came softly over the sea ; and they had reached Venice.

The flashes of the summer lightning soon became more brilliant. Lady Augusta, aroused from her short slumber, would have been excited and frightened but for Claude’s presence. Her trust in him seemed unbounded ; and he managed her so kindly, yet so firmly ;—Susan could not help saying to him once, that they must be very thankful to him ; and he answered simply, that it was an equal cause of thankfulness to him. His first sight of Venice would have been very different to him if he had been with those who could not feel with him.

A line of houses was now before them. It seemed that they were approaching directly in front of them ; but the gondoliers dexterously turned a sharp corner, and they found

themselves in a street of water,—the tall, irregular houses on each side, built of brick, and having sufficient space before them for a footpath. But this was only at the entrance of the city : as the gondolas entered narrower canals, the walls of the buildings came close to the water's edge, and doors opened from the houses directly upon it. Yet the sight of human habitations gave but little idea of human existence. Gloom, stillness, mystery brooded over the faintly-gleaming, watery streets. There were no sounds of mirth in the houses, no indications of the bustle of traffic or the excitement of pleasure. The idea of any living being as connected with those once princely dwellings never suggested itself to the mind. It might well have been a city of the dead ; for the only life that exhibited itself was the ghostly gondola, which occasionally glided by like a floating coffin, giving notice of its approach by the light fastened to the awning, and casting a sudden gleam upon the carving and ornament of some house, splendid even in its decay ; and then passing noiselessly away, and leaving all again to the increasing darkness.

But the gondolas emerged from the narrow canal, and crossed one much broader, and more winding in its course. Lights were seen in the houses, lights upon the wide covered bridge, with its single arch spanning the canal.

"The Rialto," said Claude to Susan ; and she instinctively looked up, as though the forms of Shylock and Antonio were still to be seen there, forgetful of Murray's warning, so kindly destructive of all such fond imaginations, that in Shakspeare's time the present Ponte di Rialto could scarcely have been completed.

"If Helen were but with us !" said Susan. She looked back to be quite certain that the other gondola was following.

"We could have found room for her," said Sir Henry ; "only she was so quick in her arrangements. I think she *likes* to make a victim of herself."

Claude bent over the side of the gondola, and strained his eyes to see. He fell into a reverie after Sir Henry's remark, and Susan was fretted at finding that the congenial silence was quite broken, and that she was obliged to talk to her uncle, and to Lady Augusta.

"We must be near Danieli's now," said Sir Henry; "I believe it is close upon the Grand Canal."

Lady Augusta was revived by the intelligence, for she was becoming excessively tired, and inclined to complain because Annette was not with her, though what assistance Annette could have afforded under the circumstances was quite a problem.

"Not quite so close either," continued Sir Henry in a disappointed tone. "Why, we are getting into those narrow places again,—very romantic, I dare say, they are, but there is no end to them."

Sir Henry was right. In and out went the gondolas again, all in the darkness and quietness. At length they entered one canal which was singularly narrow and gloomy. The dim light still lingering in the sky showed that it was shut in by two large buildings; one lofty and richly ornamented, the other lower and perfectly plain. A high covered bridge connected them.

"Il Ponte dei Sospiri," said the foremost gondolier; and even Lady Augusta sat more upright as they drew near the Bridge of Sighs; and turning to her husband, she said: "Do they keep the people in prison now, as they used to do?"

Sir Henry made no reply. They were passing under the high arch; and even sixty years of rough contact with the world had not extinguished, though it might have deadened, the feelings of horror and indignation which the most noted scene of Venetian tyranny is calculated to excite. But they were only momentary. The gondola turned sharply

round the corner of the palace, and once more they were in the Grand Canal, and in sight of the brilliantly lighted and exquisitely beautiful arcades of the Piazzetta of St. Mark, with the tall granite Byzantine columns, keeping guard, as it were, over the soul of the city.

For human existence in Venice—that existence, at least, which first meets the eye of the stranger—is all concentrated in the great square of St. Mark: without, all is still and sepulchral in its solemnity; within, all is mirth, light and gaiety. As the republic was in its political career, so is the city still in its outward form—life and death, the most sparkling beauty and the deepest gloom, have there for centuries stood side by side; and the noiseless transition from the sparkling loveliness of the Piazzetta to the darkness of the Bridge of Sighs, is but the type of that secret, sudden, often repeated transit, so common in Venetian history, from the hopes and gladness of life to the dread stillness of the grave.

“Danieli’s at last!” It was Claude who made the remark, as they stopped in front of an archway in a side canal, with steps leading down to the water side. Claude hastened to inquire for rooms, as they had been ordered some days before, and he supposed they were all ready. But the face of the master of the hotel excited his consternation. He seemed totally unprepared for such an arrival—there had been some mistake. Rooms had, indeed, been ordered for a party travelling from Innsbruck, but they had arrived, they had already taken possession.

“No mistake at all,” was Claude’s answer. “We wrote to a friend to engage the rooms; we expected to have the rooms; in fact, we must have them. There are two invalids in the party, and they must be accommodated.”

“Very unfortunate! extremely perplexing!” The civil landlord’s obsequiousness increased with his difficulties: “he

had no doubt he should be able to manage; the hotel happened unfortunately to be extremely full; but he had rooms, very comfortable—they should be prepared.”

Claude hesitated, having some doubt about the comfortable rooms in a house already overcrowded. He went back to suggest to Sir Henry that they should try another hotel.

Lady Augusta, however, was urgent to remain where they were; she was very tired, and wanted to go to bed, and she tried to leave the gondola even before Claude was ready to give her his hand.

Sir Henry shrugged his shoulders, and said she must have her way; but he would not attempt to move himself until he was quite sure that Lady Augusta would not change her mind. “And you can stay too, Susan,” he added.

But Susan had followed Lady Augusta, and was already standing on the steps.

“We must not forget that there are letters here,” she said. “Sir John Hume must have remembered them, in spite of the blunder about the rooms.”

“But Claude can ask for them, child; there is no occasion for you to trouble yourself.”

“Thank you, no; I would rather go, it will make me happier:” and Susan, in her eagerness, hastened after the master of the hotel, asking her own questions, without waiting for Claude.

“What is the matter with Susan? Why does she hurry so?” said Lady Augusta, as Claude led her slowly up the staircase. “She heard from home a short time ago; what can she want to hear again for?”

Claude smiled at the question. He had not remarked Susan’s eagerness as anything unusual, until Lady Augusta drew his attention to it. Then it made but little impression, for he was thinking only of the “comfortable apartments.” They were shown into a dingy salon, evidently the forlorn

hope of the hotel, never to be used except in cases of emergency. Lady Augusta sat down in the nearest chair, and looked round her in dismay. "Venice!—this Venice!" She had expected a palace.

"The best we have, very sorry; but all will be found extremely comfortable," said the landlord, with one of his most courteous bows.

"I should like to have the letters very much," said Susan, in a timid tone.

"But we must look at the bedrooms first," observed Lady Augusta, fretfully. "I don't see how we are to sleep in a place like this; and beds were ordered. It is very wrong; we should not have cared what we paid. Where is Annette? I want her."

Annette appeared at the door with Helen, porters followed behind, bringing boxes and bags, with which the floor was soon covered.

"I could not prevent them," said Helen, going up to Claude. "I suspect the landlord had given them orders, not wishing to lose us. But these rooms won't do."

"They must for to-night," observed Claude. "Won't you look at the bedrooms now? and then I will go back for Sir Henry."

"*Venez, mademoiselle, venez,*" said Annette, authoritatively, opening the door of a bedroom adjoining the salon. "Miss Graham, you come too."

But Susan was quite lost to present interests. The landlord had produced a letter for her, and in the midst of the bustle and chattering, the rushing to and fro, the flinging down of boxes upon the floors, the complaints of Annette, and the murmurings of Lady Augusta, she stood reading her letter by the light of a dim lamp, placed upon a square, uncovered table, which only served to bring out in stronger relief the general discomfort of the apartment.

Claude glanced at her countenance—excitement, agitation, a strange mixture of joy and sorrow were to be read there. She read on and on rapidly, as though she could not bear to lose a word; then turned back to obtain a meaning which in her eagerness she had missed; and at length, folding up the letter, looked round her, with the air of one just wakened from a dream.

“Lady Augusta and Helen are gone to see the bedrooms,” said Claude.

“Oh! yes.” Susan’s very quiet manner was restored when she became conscious of the presence of another, and she walked into the adjoining room without allowing any further sign of excited feeling to betray itself. Here she found sufficient certainly to concentrate her attention upon the present. Lady Augusta was almost in hysterics. “Such a cold unfurnished room! Such a miserable place! And beds covered in with those close curtains, they would stifle her; she should not sleep all night. Mosquitos! what business had mosquitos in a first-rate hotel? It was quite shocking. And how could she dress? There was no dressing-table,—no washing-stand,—nothing. Danieli’s hotel good! It was the very worst she had ever entered.”

Helen suggested that they had no right to expect anything better under the circumstances. These were evidently never used except from necessity

“Then why give them to us? it is an insult. I won’t stay here. How am I to dress?”

Annette opened the door into a little dressing-room, but this only served to make matters worse. It was but a long dark strip; the floor, encrusted to represent marble, seemed a mixture of cold and dirt. Lady Augusta looked in, and then sat down in a chair wringing her hands.

“We will go to another hotel, dear mamma,” said Helen, gently. “This is not the only one to be found in Venice.”



"But to-night! what for to-night?" exclaimed Annetta. "Just see;" she pointed to some boxes, which had been brought into the room. "It will take an hour to carry them down stairs again."

Helen drew near to Susan, who was standing in the doorway between the salon and the bedroom. "What must we do?" she said; "if this is the best room, what will the worst be? I don't think we possibly can remain."

Susan, usually so sympathetic, appeared suddenly to have lost her sympathy. She answered, in an abstracted, wondering tone, "Can't we?"

Helen was provoked, and said sharply, "No, we can't. Mamma won't bear it." But the irritation was checked in a moment, as she added, "I think, Susan, you are tired."

"Rather, yes; perhaps it would be better to try another hotel," said Susan, endeavouring to shake off her absence of mind. She moved to speak to Claude; but he was quite close, and had heard what passed. Scarcely noticing Helen, he addressed himself to Susan, seeming to imagine that the arrangement of everything rested with her. It was quite clear, he said, that it would be better to try another hotel; but as the same thing might happen again, he thought it would be better to order tea for Lady Augusta, Helen, and Susan, and then go himself in the gondola with Sir Henry, to see if they could find better accommodation at the Imperatore, which had also been recommended to him. If they could have superior rooms there, he would return for them.

He said this to Susan; but it was Helen who thanked him so heartily, so gracefully! with her marvellously bewitching smile; softened, as it had been of late, into an expression in which a latent sadness could always be perceived. It was a reproach to Claude's sensitive conscience for not having put her prominently forward; but Helen was always in the background now, except where Lady Augusta's comfort was concerned.

Lady Augusta, after a little persuasion, consented to the plan proposed. Tea was prepared in the general salon of the hotel, a long, large room, not particularly attractive in appearance; but it was a great luxury to have good coffee, and fresh bread and butter, and all other *et-ceteras* placed upon the table in a style which would not have disgraced Paris; and again Lady Augusta's mind had assumed a new phase, and when Claude returned with the intelligence that he had secured splendid rooms at the Imperatore, she would willingly have remained where she was, and might even have complained of Claude, if Helen had not undertaken his defence, and insisted that they were under the greatest obligation to him, and could not possibly have managed without him.

So orders were given to Annette to pack the carpet-bags again, she in her energy having begun to unpack them, and once more the porters rushed backwards and forwards with the luggage, and the landlord, polite still, but very cold, was paid his bill, and in about ten minutes' time, the whole party were gliding, as before, in a gondola, along the great thoroughfare of the silent city. This time it was Susan who took her place with the luggage, before any one had time to remark what she was doing. Claude and Helen sat together without speaking, whilst the brilliant Piazza, the tall buildings, the lights in the windows reflected in the water, passed before them like the unrealised beauty of a dream; and like a dream too, or rather like the unsubstantial reality of fairy land, was the grandeur of the Imperatore, a palace in appearance, once a palace in fact. The flight of broad steps, and the large court surrounded by pillars, and having a fountain in the centre, the splendid suite of rooms, with painted walls and ceiling, floors representing marbles, and sofas and chairs covered with crimson and white damask, were strangely in contrast with the dinginess of Treviso, and the scantily-

furnished apartments of Capo di Ponte, and Cortina d'Ampezzo; and at last Lady Augusta and Sir Henry were thoroughly satisfied.

Perhaps they were the only members of the party who had cause to be so.



## CHAPTER LXXVI.

SUSAN was the first person who appeared in the salon the next morning. Helen was tired, and had taken advantage of the certainty that Lady Augusta would be late. She was in much better spirits, however, as Susan informed Claude when he joined her; for she was sanguine as to the effect of rest and quiet amusement upon Lady Augusta's mind. As to Susan's own spirits, Claude did not, of course, inquire about them; but they were a problem to him. She talked a good deal, yet rather as though she were trying to keep down some thought which would strive to be uppermost, than as if really interested, even in Venice. Yet the palace of the Foscari was immediately opposite, and the waters of the Grand Canal were before her, and the gondolas passed backwards and forwards in front of the windows, giving a view of that singular amphibious life which only Venice can offer, and which it would seem must occupy the attention, if anything external can. But no, Susan was not occupied; and Claude heard her confess to Helen, when after some delay they all sat down to breakfast, that she had passed a sleepless night.

"Papa says we must engage a gondola to take us out regularly," said Helen. "I went into his room just now to ask him how he was; and he says he is so much better, that

he thinks in a day or two he shall be able to take care of us himself."

Claude's countenance fell. He said, rather drily: "In that case, if Captain Hume should be in Venice, I shall be able to go to Milan with him, as I at first intended."

Susan's hand trembled as she was lifting her coffee cup; but no one saw it, and Helen said, quietly: "We should be sorry to interrupt your plans, but you have been a great help to us."

"A crutch for Sir Henry," said Claude, trying to laugh; "but, if I am to go soon, I must make the best use of my time. Do you think you shall be able to go out this morning?" he added, addressing Lady Augusta.

"Perhaps, by and by, in the evening; but it is pleasant sitting at the window, and the heat makes me ill."

Claude looked very blank. He had not exactly calculated before upon the difficulties of seeing Venice when both Sir Henry and Lady Augusta were invalids.

"Sir John and Lady Hume," he said, "were to take up their quarters at the Leone Bianco, I believe; the distance is not very great, I could go to them this morning, and if you did not dislike the idea of seeing them, they might be useful to Helen, and"—a slight pause—"Miss Graham."

"Mamma won't like it," replied Helen, quickly; "she has not seen Lady Hume for a long time, and we can wait very well. Papa will be better, I dare say, in a day or two."

But Claude persisted, and pressed the question again upon Lady Augusta, who seemed annoyed, and said that they might as well be in England if they were to have only English people about them.

"Pray, pray don't," said Helen, in an undertone; but Lady Augusta heard.

"Why do you say don't? what do you mean? I can't bear mysteries. Why can't you all speak out? what is the matter?"

"Nothing, dear mamma; only Claude is anxious we should go about and see everything, and we are willing to wait till you can take us," answered Helen, soothingly.

"I don't want you to wait for me, I can do very well with Annette," said Lady Augusta, in a fretful tone. "People who are ill are always in the way. It would be a good thing if I was taken out of it."

Helen's eyes filled with tears. She turned appealingly to Susan, who had been sitting very silent, pretending to eat rather than really eating her breakfast, and said: "What are we to do?" Susan started; her thoughts had been absent, she only half comprehended the question, and in reply observed that she had letters to write.

"Then you had better go out by yourself," continued Helen, speaking to Claude with quiet determination of manner; "and if you will engage a gondola for us for the evening, we shall do very well, very well indeed," she added, cheerfully. "With the Palazzo Foscari before us, what can we want more?"

She rose from the breakfast-table as she spoke, and proposed to Lady Augusta to have her chair drawn near the window. Claude assisted her in moving it, whilst Susan left the room.

Annette was summoned to bring Lady Augusta's work-basket, and attend to several other little needs, any one of which, neglected, would have caused a fit of ill-humour; and Claude proposed to go and see Sir Henry. Yet he lingered in the room still. Helen was searching in her portfolio for some drawing-paper, having a fancy to sketch some of the beautiful bits of ornamental architecture on the opposite side of the canal. He went up to her, and asked, in a low voice, whether she was quite sure they were right about Lady Hume.

"Quite sure we must do whatever pleases mamma," replied Helen, bending down over her drawing.

"But your cousin? Won't you think of her?" said Claude, eagerly.

Helen's eyes were raised for a moment to his with an involuntary, but searching, look of inquiry. As they sank again, she said, "I did not remember her. I will talk to mamma again; or, perhaps, if Lady Hume would call, I would see her if mamma would not; and then, if she were going any where, Susan might go with her."

"And you?" said Claude.

"I can't go; it doesn't signify; don't think about me." Helen moved away, apparently unwilling to pursue the conversation; and Claude went to Sir Henry. He came back again after some time, saying that he was going out, and should engage a gondola for a week, and call at the post office; perhaps, also, he might go to the Leone Bianco, and see Sir John and Lady Hume, and learn if Captain Hume was expected. He said this intending Lady Augusta to remark upon it; but she said nothing, neither did Helen.

Lady Augusta took her crochet, Helen her drawing, Susan her writing-case. They might have been at home as regarded their occupations, except that the exquisite outline of Helen's sketch could never have been suggested by any architecture in England. The quietness was so singular, from the absence of all the usual noises of a great city, that it struck Helen at last with a sense of the ludicrous. "Would any one believe," she exclaimed, "that three people could sit themselves down, as we are doing now, to crochet, and dull sketching, and writing, with Venice before them unseen?"

"Necessity," replied Susan, without raising her eyes; and she went on writing rapidly.

Helen laid down her pencil and watched her. "Susan, I envy you; I would give worlds to be so quiet."

"Am I quiet?" replied Susan. She did look up now;

and her full, dark grey eyes seemed expanded with some intense feeling. She put a letter across the table to Helen, and said, "Read that."

And Helen read; and when she had finished, she folded up the letter again, and, stealing gently to the opposite side of the table, so as not to attract Lady Augusta's attention, bent over Susan, and, kissing her tenderly, said, in a low voice, "I am so glad if you are."

"Yes, I am,—I think so; but it is all strange. I will tell you more by and by; but I wanted you to know."

Helen returned to her drawing, Susan to her writing.

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## CHAPTER LXXVII.

CLAUDE in the meantime was gliding down the Grand Canal.

He engaged a gondola for the week, went to the post office, and to the Leone Bianco, found Lady Hume at home, and enlisted her compassion in behalf of Helen and Susan, and persuaded her to call in the afternoon and take them to the Piazza and St. Mark's, roused Miss Hume to enthusiasm on the subject of pictures, and proposed a plan for spending the next morning at the Academia, and, in fact, played so perfectly the part of brother and disinterested friend, that neither Lady Hume nor her daughters, when they gossiped about him after he was gone, could find anything in what he had said or done to excite any interesting speculation as to his feelings, except that he had spoken of Helen as Miss Clare; and so they supposed he must still bear her a grudge for having jilted him.

Poor Claude! he floated back to the Imperatore, yielding himself to the luxurious feelings caused by the delicious

climate, and the gliding motion, and the magic beauty of the buildings, whilst care was lulled to rest, and sorrow so soothed that it ceased to be pain; and hope, gentle and enticing, lured him on to those soft, rainbow-like visions of the future which we indulge unconscious of danger, because there appears no prospect of their being realized. Life in that marvellous city of beauty and repose appeared so unlike the bustling selfishness and the harsh conflict with opposing wills to which he had of late been accustomed, that he thought of it as of a different existence; and once more the deep poetry of his nature was awakened within him, and he dreamed of happiness.

Yet it was not the happiness which he had pictured to himself at Ivors, when in the fulness of his devotion he had knelt before Helen Clare and offered his heart, not to her, but to the creature of his own imagination. That dream, from which he had been so rudely awakened, could never return. He might love, but it would be in a different way. His was not a nature to be deceived twice; and now the form which hovered before his eyes, though it had the outward lineaments of the same Helen, bore the impress of a character, far different from that which he had then, even in his highest moments, imagined.

He saw her not as an angel, but a woman—with much to repent of—much for which even he could attempt no extenuation; but conscious of her faults, struggling against the temptations, which beset her to yield to them, with the strength which gave the victory to the martyrs of old; and bearing with her wherever she moved the power of that deep-rooted earnestness of purpose which is the life of every self-denying action, and without which action is worthless. Lovely she was still; but it was a beauty which angels might share, for it was the loveliness of a redeemed and purified spirit; and when age should destroy the freshness



of its charm, it would still be there, seen by the eye of God, and acknowledged by the reverence of man. Graceful also, and winning, she appeared to him; but the grace was accompanied by the repose of humility, and the winning brightness of her smile was tempered by the thoughtful sadness of one who could never forget that God had placed before her "life and death, blessing and cursing," and that, by the wilfulness of her own choice, she had turned from life, and accepted death.

When Claude landed at the steps of the Imperatore, the fevered thought working in his brain was,—did the Helen so changed, so chastened, look upon him with an eye as different from the fancy of former days as that with which he regarded her?

It was a question to be solved,—how, when, where, he knew not, and could not trust himself to think.

Annette met him in the court-yard: he had a letter for her, and gave it, and received, instead of thanks, complaints that she had not had it before. She tried to prevent him from going in: Lady Augusta, she said, was resting on the sofa in the salon; and it would be better not to interrupt her. Dinner had been ordered at two o'clock; and they were all going out in the gondola afterwards. Sir Henry was writing in his room.

There was no companionship for Claude; and unable, in the present state of his mind, to bear solitude, he dismissed his gondola, and hurried away to find the intricate alleys and narrow lanes in which the main business of the city is conducted. The Venetian world was seen here in its most crowded, energetic form; and it was this which Claude needed. The doubt suggested to his mind became more and more agonising as he realised the possibility of solving it; and to distract his thoughts was his strong necessity. He strode on through the bustling alleys, forcing himself to re-

mark every thing strange, stopping before the small open shops without windows, in which men and women were plying their different trades; listening to the unintelligible jargon of women seated at stalls, selling fruit and boiling chestnuts; standing upon a steep bridge over some narrow canal, and watching a gondola glide underneath it; then pausing before a church with an open space in front, and once or twice entering to admire the gorgeous marbles and mosaics, and to wonder that so much richness should be lavished to so little purpose as regarded the general effect.

It was one o'clock before he found himself in the Merceria. There, while trying to amuse himself with looking at the shops, which are certainly the best in Venice, he recognised the tones of a voice he knew, and saw, to his surprise, Annette standing at the entrance of a Turkey warehouse, and bargaining for a Turkish dressing-gown. She was talking eagerly; yet she saw Claude, as she saw everything and every person. Nothing under any circumstances escaped her observation.

"Ah! Monsieur Egerton. How did you come? I thought you gone home."

"No, Annette, you could not have thought that; you saw me leave the hotel. But what business have you here?"

"Business! a great deal; why must you inquire?" and Annette frowned. "Am I not to see the world? You all so selfish, you never think of the ladies' maids; and they slave, slave, they nothing but slaves."

"Nonsense, Annette," said Claude, good-humouredly; "you know there are no persons in the world more thought of than ladies' maids; and as for you, you rule everything."

"*Badinage! folie!* I never understand Monsieur Egerton, he speaks so queer." But Annette's tone was softened, and she added, "*Pauvre Sir Henri*, he must have a new

dressing-gown, and I said I would see for it for him. Miladi begged me to come out. When you were gone she waked up, and Miladi Hume called and took Miss Graham out, and Mademoiselle stayed with Miladi; and then Sir John's man was in the courtyard, and he offer to come with me here. So now, Monsieur Egerton, you understand." And Annette drew herself up with the proud satisfaction of having quite redeemed herself from any suspicion of neglect of duty.

"Quite, Annette, quite. Miss Clare, you said, stayed with Lady Augusta?"

"Yes; but Miladi did not wish it, only Mademoiselle said that it would be well for me to get out; and Sir Henry, he like her to read to him. Mademoiselle a very good daughter, Monsieur Egerton."

Annette nodded oracularly, and returned to her bargain with the master of the Turkey warehouse.

The natural thing for Claude to do was to leave her; but some secret feeling detained him. He gave his opinion unasked about the pattern of the dressing-gown, and lingered to look at some curious Turkish purses and bags, and purchased a box of sweetmeats for an old friend in England. When Annette had finished her business, he asked if she was going back.

She seemed a little annoyed at the question, probably fancying that it implied some control over her movements. Sir John's man, she said, would take very good care of her. She should be at home in time for Lady Augusta's dinner. It was hard not to have some few minutes at her own disposal; and it was so hot, so hot!

What this had to do with the former part of the sentence Claude could not tell; but Annette sat down in the shop, apparently fatigued, and with a full determination not to move.

"Well, then, I shall tell Lady Augusta where I left

you, so that she need not be anxious. Have you any idea where Lady Hume was going to take Miss Graham?"

Annette's eyes flashed with some sudden thought. Forgetting her exhaustion, she started from her seat and seized Claude by the arm. "Ah! monsieur, monsieur!" And she shook her head at him so solemnly, that Claude burst into a fit of laughter.

"Very well to laugh, but no laughing matter; you will know soon enough; and then you will cry."

"Cry? senseless woman!" and Claude shook himself from her and spoke quite fiercely; "tell me at once what you mean!"

"You young gentlemen very blind; you think your ladies angels; but they not angels at all. Miss Graham is a *fiancée*; she engaged to be married, as you call it."

Annette fixed her eyes upon Claude whilst she spoke, with the triumphant feeling of having him in her power and giving him a severe blow, and yet with womanly compassion at the pain which she felt she was inflicting. But, to her surprise, Claude bore the stroke without shrinking. His face, indeed, was inexplicable; it expressed something very nearly akin to satisfaction as he said, lightly, "Why, Annette, where did you pick up that gossip?"

"You not believe it? but it is true. Do you see this letter?" And she drew forth the letter which she had that morning received. "It is from Wingfield, from a very dear friend; her sister lives with Mrs. Graham; so you see there can be no doubt. Look!" She pointed to a sentence. "It says, 'Miss Graham is to be married quite soon, but you are not to tell any one, for my sister would be very angry if she knew I had mentioned it; and she will not say the gentleman's name, but I shall certainly find out.' Who can doubt that?" added Annette, in a tone of exceeding irritation, caused evidently by finding that Claude persisted in appearing unmoved.

"Who wishes to doubt it?" he said, carelessly. "But, Annette, I advise you the next time that you have a secret committed to you, to be more careful how you betray it."

"Betray! I betray! I scorn it!" exclaimed Annette, her face becoming fiery with indignation. "But I say what I say to put young gentlemen on their guard. Miss Graham look very good, and keep up in a corner, and she never say nothing to no one; but she very deep."

"Possibly," said Claude, haughtily. "I have no wish to discuss Miss Graham. I advise you, Annette, to finish your commissions quickly, or you will not be at the hotel in time for Lady Augusta's dinner."

He walked away, and Annette stood at the door of the shop, watching him as he made his way through the narrow street of the Merceria and passed under the brilliantly painted clock tower into the Piazza of St. Mark; and then with a shrug of the shoulders, and the usual exclamation—"Ah! *qu'il est sot!*"—returned to complete her bargain with the Turkey merchant.

Claude wandered through the Piazza without in the least understanding its beauty. The delicate tracery of the arcades, the symmetry of the tall Campanile, even the gorgeous richness of the exterior of St. Mark's, glittering with gold, marbles, and mosaics, were lost upon him. His eye, indeed, rested upon the outward forms of the buildings; but his attention was entirely withdrawn from them, it was impossible to study them. He held a guide book in his hand, and read all that could be said of the history of the glorious cathedral, and looked, as he was told to do, at the gilt bronze horses, and the glittering gates, and the three pedestals from which rise the masts that once supported the banners of the republic; but it was all mechanical. Every figure which passed him suggested some thought of Helen; and every beauty which met his eye brought the longing that she could

be at his side to admire it; and when the recollection of Susan, and of Annette's intelligence, fully confirmed by the observations he had himself made upon her agitation when receiving her letters, crossed his mind; it was with the thought of relief, that now he might be free, as he had once been, without any fear of exciting remark. He scarcely had understood till then the annoyance which Annette's impertinent hints had been to him, or the check they had continually placed upon his freedom of feeling and action. But all that was over. Susan had been his friend always, she would be so now more than ever. Unselfish and sympathising, she would never allow her own happiness to interfere with her feeling for others; and he might talk to her, and might learn from her everything which he wished to know. Perhaps, even, he might so far enlist her on his side, as to induce her to say something which would have the effect of sounding Helen's feelings, and save him the misery and humiliation of a second refusal. He looked upon her as his guardian angel. He felt so sure of her affection for Helen, and her entire comprehension of himself, that at the moment he could have gone to her to acknowledge his every thought, and entreat her aid and counsel. Trust,—that was the one feeling which had for years been uppermost in his mind whenever he thought of Susan; and now, in the excitement, and distrust, and despondency of heart caused by the bitter remembrances of the past, it was increased tenfold. Claude found his way to the Piazzetta, threw himself into a gondola, and gave the direction to the Imperatore, and again, under the tranquillising influence of the smooth motion, grew calm, thankful, and hopeful.

## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

SUSAN'S letter had occupied her till she was disturbed by Lady Hume's visit. It might have occupied her still longer if she had said all that it was in her heart to say; but it was hastily closed and given to Sir John, after a strict promise that he himself would put it into the post. It was addressed to Mrs. Graham.

"MY DEAREST MOTHER,

"We are at Venice. I can't tell you more than that; for I have just had your letter, and can think of nothing else. I can scarcely say how I feel, it is all so sudden and startling; but if you are satisfied, I must be. Tell my darling Isabella that if I had wings, I would leave Venice unseen only to have the pleasure of kissing her, and telling her how I long for her to be happy. I always thought Mr. George Berry liked her; but then I thought too that he liked all of us, and I confess that I had not the most remote idea of anything serious. It must all have been managed since I left home, which appears an incredibly short space of time to have got up such an affair, as people say. You know my notion has always been that it would require to know a person for years before one could have a feeling approaching to love; but Isabella was always different from me, so I can't possibly judge; and I do think, truly and honestly, that she will be infinitely more happy married than she ever could have been unmarried. My dearest mother, I am sure this is not exuberant, as it ought to be; Helen would tell me that I am dreadfully cold; but I can say anything to you, and you will understand. I am so afraid of Bella's moods. I will tell you now what I never quite liked to tell

you before, because it was only worrying and did no good. They have been the great drawback to all my happiness; they have given me a feeling of insecurity, of walking upon quicksands, even when I had you, my own, precious mother to fall back upon; and I am so afraid it may be the same now. I don't fancy that a man can understand and bear with such a temperament as a woman can; and I seem to wish so very much to know more of Mr. Berry. You say he is religious, and upright, and honourable; but I can't help fancying that underneath all your expressions of satisfaction, there is a slight misgiving. Do you think he knows Isabella? Does he see her truly? I wish I could talk to him about her; I feel I could put him in the way of managing her. Then, again, I feel that to be obliged to manage a wife must be so trying. Do you remember the French saying, '*on n'a jamais de l'enthousiame pour ce qu'on ménage?*' Since you showed it me it has always been in my mind when thinking of dear Isabella; and the possibility of her being married. But on the other hand, she will be so devoted and earnest in her duties, it must come right. My own mother, please write to me and tell me that you are sure of it. I long so inexpressibly for your word; nothing else will satisfy me, and my head grows quite dizzy with thought. More and more I feel that, if I could see Bella and Anna happy, and Charlie doing well, I could bear anything which might come to myself. That sounds very melancholy, as if I were not enjoying myself; but I am, more than I can always understand or express. It is a new life here; nothing seems real to me. Perhaps it may be the effect of these watery streets, the sense of instability, which living on the sea gives; but even before we arrived here, I had a strange difficulty in realising my own happiness,—the sensation of walking in a dream. I have actually felt my pulse, to be quite sure that I was a living, substantial being; and now I



look at the houses opposite, and could fancy that they would vanish before my eyes. But it is all bright, warm, exhilarating;—perfect, when I don't think; and I am learning to give up thought. Whom could I say this to except you, who know every feeling that rises in my heart, and can interpret my words exactly according to their true meaning?

“I shall write again in a very few days. We are at the Imperatore, just opposite the Foscari Palace. I have seen nothing yet, except the view from the windows, and the glimpses of the city last night, when we entered late. It was all exquisite. One feeling I have this morning akin to disappointment. The houses look poverty-stricken; I was not prepared for that; but I can't judge till I have seen more. Lady Hume, who is here, has just called, and offered to take me out. Lady Augusta is better, in a way; I am not sanguine about any permanent amendment. Poor Helen flatters herself that things will be better now we are at rest; we have had many trials on the journey, which I must wait till we meet to tell you. Mr. Egerton is here with us; he joined us at Conegliano (where Sir Henry met with an accident, not very serious, but very inconvenient; he hurt his foot by slipping down some steps); and being helpless, Mr. Egerton offered to come with us, and take care of us. He is the greatest possible comfort to Sir Henry. I don't know how long he stays. I have so very much to say, this all seems nothing. I can't give descriptions, and perhaps you would not care to have them; and Isabella will be too happy to think of them; and Anna must learn patience, and she shall hear everything when we meet. Would you believe it, that even now, at Venice, I long for that more than for anything? It must be that I am growing old that I can't throw myself into enjoyment as I used to do. One thing always sad to me is Helen. She is so blighted and crushed; and I can scarcely tell why she should be, except that she has ex-

hausted so much excitement in such a short time. We scarcely ever talk of the past ; I have seen her shudder at Captain Mordaunt's name, and Madame Reinhard is a forbidden topic by tacit consent. I suppose the farther one travels from a great danger the more frightful it appears. But Helen, I am sure, is entirely in earnest now, though she will scarcely acknowledge it ; I think she would feel more confidence in herself if she had fewer cares for Lady Augusta. She is one of those persons who, I always fancy, require a southern climate, moral and mental, to enable them to bring the good that is in them to perfection. This she certainly has not now.

" But this is very presumptuous in me ; and I have kept Lady Hume waiting, and can only send ten thousand loves to you all. My own precious mother, when I am writing to you I always long for a new vocabulary of affection.

" Your ever loving and grateful child,

" S. G."

Venice is known by almost every one either by experience or description. The glories of St. Mark's have been portrayed, the impressive gloom of its red marble walls, the brightness of its golden mosaics, the antiquity of its worn, tessellated pavement. The Doge's Palace has been sketched, and painted, and engraved, and every line of its wonderful architecture brought clearly into view, and the impression of surpassing beauty which it gives carefully analysed. History and poetry have joined hand in hand to throw a charm over the minutest details of the humblest Venetian building, and to give romance to the most ordinary objects of daily life ; things which in other cities would be passed by unnoticed are in Venice consecrated by association with all that is awful, mysterious, and exciting. And so it is that life in Venice, although made up of the same homely mate-

rials which are requisite for existence in other places, must always stand out apart, as something which can never be enjoyed elsewhere. The events which occur to us may be the same; but the feelings which they awaken must always be different.

Lady Hume, the most matter-of-fact of old ladies, took upon herself, most kindly and willingly, the office of chaperone. Her gondola was daily seen at the stairs before the courtyard of the Imperatore; and daily were parties formed for the Academia, or St. Mark's, or the Piazza, or the Palace, or perhaps for a visit to Murano or Torcello, or to some of the splendid but disappointing churches with which Venice abounds. It was a perpetual course of sight-seeing; and nothing becomes, in general, more wearisome after a time. But there is a charm in Venice independent of its sights—a luxury in the mere feeling of existence, a new and ever-present loveliness in the soft, watery colouring, and the rich, intricate, misty lines of the buildings which pass before the eye; and day after day as Susan Graham glided along the Grand Canal, with Claude seated beside her, the feeling of deep, hidden delight increased. He was her constant companion now. It seemed quite natural that he should be the person to hand her into the gondola, and find a place next her. Sir John Hume took care of Helen, and Miss Hume and her sister engaged her in conversation; and if, as was often the case, the party was too large to be together, Sir John, as a matter of course, insisted that Helen should come with him, and left Claude in charge of the rest. It was a very natural arrangement, a kind feeling on the part of Lady Hume, that Claude and Helen might, under the circumstances, feel more at their ease when separate; and Claude, as it appeared, had no wish to alter it.

When with Susan, his whole tone and manner was that of being quite at rest with one who thoroughly understood

him. It was not that they always talked much together ; at times they would sit so long silent as to awaken observation ; but whatever was said showed that quick, sympathising appreciation of each other's tastes which binds heart with heart more firmly far than words.

And on one subject Susan thought that she entirely comprehended Claude: They often spoke of Helen ; and it was a pleasure to her to be able to do so. It put her more at ease with him than anything else could ; for it showed that even upon the point on which he had felt and suffered most keenly, he could open his mind to her. Claude, indeed, never referred directly to past events ; but he talked much and freely of all that had occurred in London ; he inquired minutely into the extent of Madame Reinhard's influence, and Helen's present feelings respecting her. He even went so far as to beg Susan to communicate to Helen some painful facts which had reached him, as to Madame Reinhard's domestic life, her open neglect of her husband, and the alienation between them, which was now so public as to cause her to be shunned by many persons who had before admitted her to their society. She was, he said, fast sinking to the level of the Baroness d'Olban ; her principles were working out their fatal effect ; and even if Helen had never openly separated from her, it would have been impossible to keep up the acquaintance. He told all this with what might have been the kind, protecting interest of a brother, desirous to know what effect the baneful influence exercised upon Helen's mind had produced. And Susan replied to him with equal simplicity and openness. In her anxiety to make him do justice to her cousin, she described to him the interview in which Helen's eyes were first opened to Madame Reinhard's conduct, and dwelt much upon the few words in which she had since expressed her unutterable thankfulness for having been saved from a marriage which must have been

utterly fatal to her happiness. "Helen," she said, "looked back upon that time with a feeling far deeper than regret. It was a deep sincere repentance, too sacred to be alluded to, but which was never absent from her mind; and any person watching her daily life would see how the remembrance worked upon her." And then Susan went on to give little details of Helen's thoughtfulness and nobleness, the unselfishness which was a part of her natural character, but which had been hidden by worldly follies; and at length she touched upon religion, and her countenance lighted up, and became almost beautiful, as she spoke of the quiet, unseen growth of feelings which Helen in her humility was almost afraid to acknowledge, but which were evinced by every action, and every expression of taste or feeling. Some months before, Susan might have felt it an effort to say all this; she might have remembered that Helen had once been very dear to Claude; and a secret jealousy might have chilled her tones, and arrested the eager flow of her words. But that time was separated from the present as by a vast gulf. They were in Venice, living a new life amid new scenes, beneath the power of a new atmosphere; and as the gondola floated along on its silent way, Susan looked at the past as she did upon the aerial outlines which rose up before her, and it became unreal and awoke neither hope nor fear, and she felt only that Claude had but one thought, one wish for her.

At the close of the first week of their stay in Venice, Susan spoke no longer in her letters of the feeling of insecurity, and the longing for home. The single drop of sadness in the fulness of her happiness was the recollection that they must separate.

And was every one else blinded? Did Venice, and its loveliness, and its associations so engross all attention that there was no thought for the living romance passing before the eye? Sir Henry and Lady Augusta for the most part

stayed at home ; or if, as happened at last when Sir Henry's lameness decreased, they sometimes joined the rest of the party, Claude was always bestowing his time and attention upon their comfort. Lady Hume did not understand love without the laughing, and talking, and badinage of flirtation ; and the Miss Humes supposed that, because Claude and Susan were content to sit together sometimes for half an hour at a time without speaking, they considered each other dull companions. But there was one who saw all, and thought she understood all, and, with the firm energy of a heart which has voluntarily cast away a treasure that might have been its own, and knows that from henceforth it must be content to live without it, stifled every pang of regret which would have risen up to mar its peace, and soberly and thankfully accepted the contentment which was brought to it by the sight of another's joy.

One great and lingering grief to Helen had been the knowledge that she had rendered Claude miserable. She believed now that he was on the way to happiness ; and her heart beat more lightly as she watched him talking to Susan, or heard him appeal to her on some question of taste, with the confident tone which showed that they were entirely of one mind. It seemed as though she were, in some degree, making amends to him for her former conduct, by furthering his wishes now ; and it was often by her delicately-managed contrivance that Claude found himself left to take care of Susan in walking, as well as placed by her side in the gondola.

Poor Helen could live now only in self-sacrifice. It was a rest to her conscience,—the living evidence which she required to prove to herself that she was not utterly heartless ; for when our faith in ourselves has once been thoroughly shaken, it requires a long, long time to restore it. We cannot trust our own hearts as others trust them ; and much of

the comfort of the self-imposed penances so often abused may probably be found, not in the hope of atoning for what has been wrong in the past, but simply in giving us confidence for the present.



## CHAPTER LXXIX.

It was a deliciously warm morning, yet in no way overpowering, so as to render going out impossible ; and it was very early, not later than seven. Helen and Susan were in a gondola, with Lady Hume's elderly German Abigail to act as chaperone. Annette could not be spared ; and Helen was bent upon making a sketch of a very beautiful bit of the Doge's palace, as seen from one of the entrances to St. Mark's, and could only hope to do so by taking advantage of the comparatively quiet morning hours. Drawing was her constant employment and interest now ; and perhaps none but Susan could appreciate the amount of self-control and power of will exercised in thus forcing herself into an occupation which had no definite aim nor external stimulus. In bygone days, Helen's drawing moods had been as variable as her temper, and she had believed that it was as impossible to control the one as the other ; but she was learning by degrees that God intends us to discipline our minds by our tastes and inclinations as well as by our faults. The love of freedom, which had once been her temptation, was now becoming her great safeguard. Helen had known what it was to be her own slave ; and now her whole heart was bent upon asserting that blessed freedom of will which, through God's grace, keeps in check even the passing humours and fancies to which so many, really in earnest in great matters, yield

without repentance, and scarcely with regret. In Susan's eyes, she was more to be respected in the ceaseless watch kept over petty temptations to indolence, self-indulgence, and changeableness, than even in her untiring devotion to Lady Augusta, and the unselfish consideration which put every one before herself. Claude, Susan thought, could not see these temptations; and it was difficult to point them out to him without asserting a certain amount of superiority, as though she never gave way to them herself. But she did sometimes, laughingly, draw his attention to the fact that Helen was the only person of the party who could never afford to have an idle minute; and Claude, in his grave, abstracted way, would listen to what she said, and watch Helen for a few minutes, and perhaps even go up to the table at which she was drawing, and make some remark upon her sketch; but there was no excitement or eagerness in his manner. It was evidently a greater effort to speak to Helen than to talk even to Miss Hume; and so the drawing went on, no one particularly appearing to care for it except Sir Henry; and his was more a father's pride in his child's talent, than the discriminating approbation of a person who really understood its worth.

"I shall finish my sketch this morning, I hope," said Helen, as she sat down by her cousin, and the gondola was pushed off from the steps; "and then you and poor Louise may have a little longer rest in the morning. It makes me quite ashamed of myself to bring you out in this way, only that it is so intensely delicious."

"Every hour in Venice is a memory," said Susan; "one would be ashamed of missing more than one is actually obliged. Just look, now, at that most exquisite bit of balcony, at the very top of the palace opposite, and the dingy old woman looking over it. All the Venetian history one could ever read would not realise the facts to one so much as



that. I can notice these things, and think upon them when I am alone with you, in these quiet mornings; but I don't know how it is, I do nothing but dream when we are all together."

"Do you dream?" said Helen; and she sighed. "I wish I could; but dreaming is over for me."

Susan took her hand affectionately. "Helen, dearest, I can't preach; and it seems often as if I had no right to show sympathy: can you understand that? Just now, everything is so bright to me."

Helen looked at her very earnestly. "When you are happy, Susan," she said, "you will never be selfish, as others are. When I was happy, I forgot every one but myself."

It seemed as if Susan would not trust herself to understand what might be in her cousin's thoughts. She turned from the personal allusion, and spoke of her sister. "I had another letter from mamma yesterday," she said; "and it has taken a great load off my mind. I feel sure that what I always hoped will really be the case. Isabella has no moods and fancies now, mamma says. Everything is too real and important to admit of them."

"Because she loves," said Helen, thoughtfully. "Yes, that must make everything real! the little things must be so swallowed up in the great feeling."

"Mamma is not quite so sanguine as I am," continued Susan. "She tells me that she is perfectly satisfied for the present, and trusts to God for the future; but her theory is, that when the excitement of feeling goes off, all the old faults will revive. One thing, however, I am quite sure of, that Isabella will be much better, even if she should not be much happier, married than unmarried."

"It must, I suppose, require strength of mind to be roughly good, and contented, and happy, unmarried," said Helen; "to be quite satisfied to go through the world alone."

Susan made no reply.

"Don't you think so?" continued Helen.

Susan's face was flushed with eagerness, and then pale with some sudden revulsion of feeling, as she answered, "I don't know; I thought I could be so once."

"I am trying to make up my mind and to train myself for it," said Helen, more lightly. "One thing I have resolved upon; I will never be a useless, idle, gossiping old maid. I am not quite sure, though, as to being a useful aunt. I have rather a horror of that; but I don't make vows upon the subject; for if I do, I shall infallibly break them. Maurice must promise, however, to marry a person whom I approve."

"I don't think I could be happy in merely being any *one* thing," said Susan. "I mean I should like to look upon my condition, whatever it may be, on all sides, and so embrace it fully and heartily. I used to fancy that I never could be satisfied, unless I regarded old maidism, in a certain way, as a profession; but I may be wrong; I can't say." And she bent over the side of the gondola, dipping her parasol in the water.

Helen sat in thought for some seconds; then she said, gravely, "I should like to be taught by you, Susan. You would have made a better old maid than I shall ever be."

"God places us where it is best," said Susan, without raising herself up; "so, Helen dear, if we are to be old maids, I suppose there can be no doubt that it is the right state for us."

"Yes," said Helen; "but some endure their condition; others, as you say, accept it, and make use of it; that is what I should wish to do, but what I never shall do."

"You don't know yourself," said Susan, hastily. The tone of her voice betrayed that the subject was painful.

"Do we land here, ladies?" said Louise, pointing to the

Piazzetta, and bending forward from the back seat where she had been attentively studying the book which on these morning excursions she always carried with her.

"No, not here. On a little farther—till we wish to turn," exclaimed Helen to the gondoliers; and the slender boat glided on its course again, and Helen, addressing Susan, said, "the drawing will wait; it is too delicious to land."

Susan neither acquiesced nor objected; she seemed lost in thought.

Helen glanced beneath her cousin's bonnet, as her head was partly turned aside, and saw the working of some secret, intense feeling, which even Susan's wonderful powers of self-command were unable thoroughly to subdue.

"Will you tell me what it is you are thinking of?" she said, in a low and gentle voice; "can I help you?"

Susan paused, then answered, calmly, "I was thinking of the difference between what we imagine we can do at one time, and what we feel we can do at another. I have had fancies about an unmarried life; but they are only fancies, I hate myself for them."

"Nay, why hate yourself?" exclaimed Helen;—"if they were good, ——"

"They were unreal, self-deceiving."

"For you, possibly," said Helen; "because you may have a different lot appointed you; but they may help others; they may be useful to me."

Susan smiled faintly. "I thought they would be useful to myself," she said. "It was the prophecy about me from childhood, that I should be an old maid. I remember one of the servants telling me so in the nursery, because I was so particular in putting away all my playthings in the same order. People don't know how those chance words work upon children. I have spent hours in thinking what I would do, when I was left alone, never realising to myself what be-

ing left alone meant. And I have been enthusiastic, that is, you know, as far as I have ever been so about anything, in my notions of the life I would lead, and the spirit I would throw into it."

"And don't you feel the same now?" said Helen, mournfully.

Susan hesitated; her hands were tightly pressed together as she said, "In reason, I think the same as ever."

They were both silent; and the gondola went on its smooth way, whilst the few soft sounds of the noiseless city were borne faintly to their ear as they passed the Guidecca and San Giorgio, and entered the more open channels of the Lagune.

Then Susan spoke as from the fulness of an earnest and saddened spirit: "I thought once—I think now—that there is but one way of viewing life, which can make it anything but a horrible mystery, a conscious insanity; and that is to take it as we are told in the Bible, simply and literally as a place of education, a school for eternity. And when I thought that, Helen, it seemed to me that all these questions of love and marriage, and the interests which belong to them, were merely accidents, different forms of probation and discipline, which might or might not be good, but which could in no way really affect the great question of hereafter; and so I put them from me. And I felt that, if I could but take my life in whatever form it might be presented to me, with a full, deep, most perfect and entire dedication of myself to God, to work for Him, to train myself as He wills, to give up every thought of personal, individual happiness, and live, as it were, solely in the happiness of others, then my heart would have rest. I thought that I should be able to take the day as it might come, without a care for the morrow; that I should be comforted by earthly love, but that I should never be dependent upon it—so dependent, I mean,

as to feel that existence could not be borne without it; and I believed that if a single life were my portion, I should be able to give my highest affection to God, and satisfy my craving for human love by expending my feelings upon many, instead of concentrating them upon one. That was my dream, Helen; it made me very contented, very happy. I felt that loneliness then would be but another word for unselfishness, sympathy, self-devotion, and that which is highest, and dearest, and best of all, the heavenly love which has no need to fear a rival. And so, instead of shrinking from the prospect of an unmarried life, I was rather thankful when I believed it might be my appointed lot."

"And is it all gone now?" said Helen; and her voice trembled.

"Not gone," exclaimed Susan; "no, not gone." But there was something in the accent with which the words were uttered, that made Helen feel she dared not ask a further explanation.

She took out her sketch-book and made a few lines, giving an idea of the churches of the Redentore and San Giorgio as they now appeared in the haze of distance; and the action served to recall Susan's thoughts.

"It is very well to enjoy ourselves in this way," she said; "but it was not what we came out for, and Sir Henry will be disappointed if he finds the drawing no more advanced than it was yesterday."

Helen gave the order to the gondolier. She did not wish to go farther; for she felt that the conversation was from some cause stopped, and Susan, with all her gentleness, was not a person who could ever permit her inmost thoughts to be fathomed against her will, even if Helen had been inclined to make the attempt.

They landed on the Piazzetta, and Louisc made a purchase of some figs, and then stationed herself as Helen's

guardian in front of one of the side entrances to St. Mark's, whilst Susan, as was her wont, went into the church.

It was by far the most satisfactory time for the enjoyment of the glorious cathedral. A few scattered worshippers were kneeling here and there upon the worn pavement, and occasionally a priest was to be seen going from one to the other and collecting alms; but there were no sight-seers, no curious gazers. The attention was neither directed to the details of the mosaics, nor to the strange patterns upon the pavement; even admiration was not called forth, but only an awe-struck sense of the mystery and solemnity of the gloomy shadows which veiled everything painful and jarring, and the rich completeness of colouring which seemed to fill the building with a tinted atmosphere. Susan's heart was very full that morning; but it was neither with joy nor sorrow, but with that vivid sense of existence, that consciousness of life, its powers of happiness, and its capacity for suffering, which, if it were continued, must, it would seem, wear away, merely by the pressure of overpowering sensation, the frail bond which unites body and soul together.

There is but one relief for that state of feeling,—quietness in the presence of God; and the weight of thought passed from Susan's heart, and its beating became more calm, as she prayed alone in the grand old church, knowing that she was close to One who understood all, and could interpret all her needs, who knew her weakness far better than she knew it herself, and who would bear her through happiness or grief safe over "the waves of this troublesome world to the land of everlasting life."

She returned again to Helen, and found a number of boys collected, whom Louise, with her wretched Germanised Italian, was endeavouring to send away. Helen herself bore their presence quietly, only now and then turning with sudden fierceness to startle some particularly bold intruder.

"*Via! via!*" and Helen, without looking round, tapped with her pencil the fingers of an impertinent urchin, who had actually put his hand upon her shoulder in his eager curiosity.

"*Inglese!*" was murmured amongst the crowd; and there was a sudden lull, whilst Susan, stooping down, whispered, "There is an English gentleman just come, who is sketching likewise; he will keep them in order."

But Helen seemed less disturbed by the Italian boys, than by a stranger from her own country, and, taking out her watch, observed that it was late, and they must be going home.

She folded up her camp-seat, put away her sketch-book, and collected her pencils.

Susan glanced at the English stranger. "A most unpleasant-looking man," she said; "so excessively slang! I am thankful he was not here before."

"It is too provoking," observed Helen, a little petulantly; "when I calculated upon having the place to myself. I suppose he will be here to-morrow."

"There are some more people coming," continued Susan. "They all seem to belong to the gentleman. How loudly they talk! really one is ashamed of one's country."

Susan's indignation was certainly quite justified. The party who had now joined the artist, were of that peculiar stamp, unfortunately too often to be met with abroad, who seem only bent upon showing that English gentlemen, when relieved from the restraints of society, can cease to be gentlemen; and English ladies almost forget that they are women. Their loud laughter, self-conscious, flippant badinage, and uncomfortable freedom of manner made Helen quicken her movements; and even Louise, though not at all understanding what was said, seemed to think it necessary to stand behind her two young ladies, so as to screen them from observation.

"If you wait, he will ask to see the sketch," whispered Susan. "He is just the sort of man who would." And the idea made poor Helen so nervous that all her drawing materials fell to the ground.

A laugh, hard, coarse, and satirical, followed the accident; and the ladies of the artist's party drew near the spot.

Susan was nearer to them than Helen. She heard some one say, "*Madame la Baronne*." The voice struck her as one she ought to recognise. She gave a timid glance round, changed colour, and, putting her arm within Helen's, said, "We will leave Louise to bring the things; we shall be better at the *Piazzetta*," and drew her cousin away.

Helen was thoroughly annoyed; her sensitiveness to anything in the most remote degree approaching to impertinence or vulgarity was almost a weakness. She seated herself in the gondola, and, with a flushed cheek and glistening eye, said, "Good-bye to my sketch; I shall never try that again."

Susan made no reply for an instant; then she said, quietly, "I am glad you did not see. It was the *Baroness d'Olbán* and ——" she paused,—"*Madame Reinhard*."

Helen started, so that Louise exclaimed, in fear. Grasping Susan's hand, whilst her face became deadly pale, she said, in a low voice, "It was an instinct; I felt something was wrong. Oh! Susan, I can't stay here."

"She will not come in our way," replied Susan; "and you would not speak if she did."

"But to see her, to know even that it is possible! Susan, you can never understand the harm she did me; the fearful, cruel harm. I feel it now; I shall feel it to my dying day. Nothing has been the same to me since I knew her. I can never be what I might have been if I had never known her. Beg Papa to go—speak for me—tell him he must."

"You forget that you might have met in London—that



it was merely accidental that you have not done so," said Susan, in a soothing but determined tone, and still holding Helen's trembling hand.

"I won't think about London; I wish only to do what I can now; and she will bring it all back to me,—the fear, the recollection of what I should have been if I had listened to her; oh, so miserable! so miserable! I don't think I saw it at the time; not as I see it now, I am sure. To have been the wife of that man,—not loving him—despising him! Susan, I can't be good where she is."

"We must find out something about her," said Susan; "perhaps she may only be here for a few days. We will ask Mr. Egerton to inquire."

Helen interrupted her. "Claude! oh, no! no! I could not bear him to be told. Yet he must know all," she added, in a lower tone; "he can't think worse of me than he does."

"You exaggerate, dearest," said Susan. "No one would say that you had done anything so shocking as you seem to fancy."

"Because no one knows me as I know myself," replied Helen. "Susan, there is not any human being who can tell the influence which Madame Reinhard's principles had over my mind. I hid them from myself in a veil of words, and would not allow myself to look at them as they really were; but I can see now plainly, as if written by a sunbeam, that they were obliterating all distinctions of right and wrong. I know that I was actually learning to forget that there was such a distinction; I would never have believed it if I had not experienced it. But, looking back at the things which I then praised,—the people whom I admired,—I can see that I might have been led into any evil, simply because I was taught to shut my eyes to the fact that it was evil. And I loved her dearly; I thought her so perfect! Oh, Susan!

don't ask me to see her again." And poor Helen hid her face in her hands, and again repeated, "I loved her so dearly!"

"We will take care; don't trouble yourself about it; leave it to me," said Susan, tenderly. "Look, we are at the Imperatore; you must not be unhappy now, or Lady Augusta will be uneasy."

Helen raised her sad eyes to her cousin's, and answered, "I must be unhappy; but no one shall know it. Only, Susan,"—her voice faltered,—“don't let Claude speak to me about her.”

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## CHAPTER LXXX.

"WELL, Helen, my darling! what success this morning?" Sir Henry, who had only for the last few mornings been able to appear at breakfast at half-past nine, put out his hand eagerly for the sketch-book in the good-humoured manner of one who is contented with himself, and determined to be contented with others.

Helen hung back. "It has been rather an unsatisfactory morning; I have not done much. We were tempted to row on a little beyond the Piazzetta, and then—we were interrupted."

She looked to Susan for assistance.

"We were hurried away by some tiresome people who would come and sketch too," continued Susan. "I suppose they had as much right as ourselves, strictly speaking; but they were so noisy and disagreeable."

Sir Henry's temper rose in a moment. "Disagreeable! I won't have you go again; I will go with you myself. The English abroad are detestable. There ought to be a law

allowing only certain people to travel. But I will go with you myself; I want to have some more sketches. I must have one of the San Giorgio; and I am getting quite right again."

"We should be rather too early for you, I am afraid," said Helen, gently; "and, later in the day, the Piazza would be too crowded."

"We will manage it,—we will do something. Where is Claude this morning?" Sir Henry glanced impatiently round the room.

Annette, who had just entered with Lady Augusta, replied that Monsieur Egerton was gone out; she believed he meant to inquire at the post office for letters.

"I don't want letters," exclaimed Sir Henry; "we are doing very well as we are here; I don't want to be reminded that we must go away. Augusta, my dear, you have no fancy for leaving Venice, have you?"

Rather an unfortunate question, considering that Lady Augusta had only five minutes before been venting a fit of the old restlessness upon Annette.

Annette took upon herself to reply. Miladi, she said, was not so well; she did not think Venice agreed with her; it was too damp.

Poor Sir Henry was discomfited; but Susan soothed him by saying, cheerfully, that up to this point Venice had certainly agreed wonderfully well with Lady Augusta; whilst Helen, with a scarcely audible sigh, occupied herself with the usual thoughtful attentions, which now commonly had the effect of driving away, at least for a time, Lady Augusta's moods.

Breakfast began rather silently; in the middle Claude entered. He had his own letters in his hand; but there were none for any one else. Helen seemed indifferent, Sir Henry rather pleased. Susan was disappointed, and said so.

"We shall expect our English news from you, Claude," said Sir Henry. "Is Buckingham Palace burnt down yet? is London in insurrection? and what are our prospects for the next session? Come man, tell us. Any hope of a change of ministry?"

"My letters are from Helmsley, said Claude, "from my bailiff chiefly. I am afraid they would not be interesting to the company at large."

Lady Augusta caught the name Helmsley, and asked, with a most unfortunate association of ideas, whether Kate Hope was there still?

Helen's face became rigid; but Claude answered quietly, yes, she was doing very well. His housekeeper had made her a very useful person. "Can I say anything to her for you?" he added, addressing Susan; "I shall see her probably before long."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," exclaimed Sir Henry; "you talk as if you had one foot in the carriage—or the gondola, I suppose I must say in Venice,—and were wishing us good-bye. We have a fortnight before us still for Italy, whether we spend it here or at Milan."

"I am afraid it will not be my fortnight," replied Claude, "I ought to be in England now."

"In England! we must all go to England," exclaimed Lady Augusta. "I don't want to see Venice any more; I would much rather go home if Claude goes."

Susan and Helen were silent. Sir Henry said, a little fretfully, "You forget, my dear, that I have been tied by the leg to that wearisome sofa ever since we have been here. I must see something of Venice before we turn homewards. And there is Milan too; I had set my heart upon the girls seeing the cathedral thoroughly. It is folly to talk of going home, when we are only just settled. Come, Claude, eat your breakfast, and then we'll decide what is to be done for

the day. I feel like a boy set free from school, now that I can move about without hopping like a lame frog from room to room."

"I fear that is precisely the reason why I must be like a boy summoned back to school," said Claude. "I have been playing truant too long; and if you can do without me I shall have an unquiet conscience, and be very disagreeable, if I stay."

"Just put conscience in your pocket for once, my dear fellow," exclaimed Sir Henry; "it's what all English people do when they come abroad. Take my word for it, you are a great deal too strait-laced. You know I always found fault with you about it when you were a boy. I verily believe people may die of an enlargement of the conscience, just as well as they may of an enlargement of the heart."

"Perhaps I agree with you," said Claude, laughing; "but I never found yet that my conscience had attained its full natural growth; so I am not much afraid of dying of its enlargement. You must remember that I gave myself five weeks for my tour when I left England, and the five weeks are nearly over."

"Five weeks! it's not breathing-time for a man who works like a dray-horse, as you do all the year round. It might be very well for a lazy old stager like myself, who has learnt to think that the young horses can draw the waggon without his aid, and so does not trouble to carry more than his own weight. But for you—why Hume told me you would have broken down, he was sure, if he had not forced you away."

"I was rather worn," said Claude, gravely; "but it was not from work only."

There was an uncomfortable pause, interrupted by another question from Lady Augusta: "Claude, did Kate Hope help to make the new furniture for Helmsley?"

"Some of it." And Claude turned to Susan, and begged for another cup of coffee.

"The drawing-room chintz was a very handsome pattern," said Lady Augusta.

Sir Henry had failed to catch the awkward train of ideas, upon which Lady Augusta so unfortunately lingered; but he could not help seeing, from the countenances round the table, that something was wrong. Seizing upon the first thought which presented itself, he said, "You have a capital bailiff at Helmsley, Hume tells me; so there can be no reason for your hurrying away in this fashion, and leaving us in the lurch. Besides, I thought you were going to wait here till Hume and his boy joined you."

"George Hume is not so well," replied Claude; "and there is some idea of his staying in Italy for the winter. That, of course, would make my joining them out of the question. But if I were to leave Venice at once, I should meet them at Verona, and have a day or two with them there; and then I might rush home as fast as I liked."

"Still bent upon rushing home," exclaimed Sir Henry. "One would think you were prime minister."

"I am prime minister in my own dominions," said Claude. "I appeal to Miss Graham;" and he changed his tone, and smiled as he spoke. "I am sure I shall have support from her. My bailiff writes me word that the work I left him is at a stand-still, for want of my presence. He says that questions arise every day which he does not feel he has authority to decide, and he respectfully hints that if English gentlemen spend half the year in London, making laws for the nation, they ought to spend the other half on their own estates, making laws for their own people. Now what can be said? what would you say?"

"That you should go," said Susan, firmly, without the least change in her voice; but the next moment, her head was bent down, and the empty coffee cup raised to her lips.

"I should like to see the new furniture at Helmsley, very much," murmured Lady Augusta; but Claude, usually so courteously attentive to her least observation, now entirely disregarded it. He looked at Susan kindly and gratefully, and there was a peculiar tone of affectionate confidence, remarked even by Sir Henry, in his words, "Thank you: I can always depend upon you for helping me to do right."

"Not very complimentary to us; eh, Helen?" exclaimed Sir Henry, hastily; and poor Helen's voice seemed nearly choked, as she tried to answer lightly and evasively, "Susan was always famous for making people do their duty."

Sir Henry, though he was not quite aware of the feeling, was a little "put out," and fancied Helen neglected; and by way of saying something which should make her feel that he at least thought a good deal of her, he told her to bring her sketch that he might look at it again; it seemed to him capital, and if they were all going to rush to England in this sudden way, she must make haste and finish it.

"I can manage to work it up from what I have done," said Helen, quickly; "I don't want to sketch any more." She was afraid that Sir Henry, in his thoughtless way, would ask Claude to go with them on some future occasion. He very often did things of this kind merely from obtuseness. He was so accustomed now to see Claude with them, that he was falling back into the pleasant, easy feeling of former days, only rendered yet more easy by the knowledge, half provoking, half satisfactory, that Claude could never be anything to Helen, she did not like him. If he cared for any one now, it was for Susan Graham.

Helen brought her sketch, and Claude praised it, but too coldly to satisfy Sir Henry; for he pointed out a defect in the perspective, and doubted whether some particular part of the tracery could be correctly drawn.

Helen stood by and listened, and owned he might be

right; but when Sir Henry declared that they would all go the very next morning to the place, and Claude should correct the sketch himself, if he fancied he knew so much better about it than any one else, she said, in a very decided way, that she had no intention of going to St. Mark's again so early; she must make the best that she could of her sketch at home.

"What! not frightened away by those noisy people?" exclaimed Sir Henry.

Claude turned round directly, to inquire what was meant; and Lady Augusta said, in a plaintive voice: "I always thought it was dangerous for them to go out alone, and Lady Hume's maid does n't understand a word of English."

"There was no danger,—nothing to fear," said Susan, seeing by the peculiar rigidity of Helen's face that a whole torrent of excited feelings was working underneath; "it was simply disagreeable. There was rather a noisy party in the Piazza this morning," she added, speaking to Claude; "and a gentleman was sketching there, so we did not have the place to ourselves as we have had before. It was of no real consequence; Helen had just finished; but I am afraid they will be likely to be there again to-morrow."

Helen had been fastening up her sketch-book. She laid it down now on the table, and said, very earnestly: "I have done as much as I shall ever wish to do; and, dear papa, as we can't have many more days in Venice, you must not waste your time upon me, but go about with Susan and see all you can."

"And why not with you, my child? What's the matter? I don't understand." Helen changed colour rapidly, and her hand trembled, and Sir Henry took hold of it anxiously, and said: "I am sure there is more in this than you will say. Those people were rude;—tell me;—I must know."



"Oh! no; indeed, no." Helen looked at her cousin to explain; and with the conviction that mystery would only make the awkwardness greater, Susan said at once: "We did not speak to them, nor they to us, but they were not all strangers to us; by sight at least. The Baroness d'Olban was one, and—Madame Reinhard."

"That woman! that audacious humbug in Venice!" Sir Henry laid his hand fondly upon Helen's head. She had sat down, and was resting it upon her hand.

Claude said, in a low, marked tone: "I heard this morning that they were in Venice."

"They are not English. Thank Heaven, they are not English!" exclaimed Sir Henry.

"Only I am afraid they have been allowed to form part of our English society," said Claude, in the same strained, uncomfortable manner.

"Such fools we are to believe in them!" exclaimed Sir Henry. "So they are all here, are they?—Monsieur le Baron, and Madame la Baronne, and Herr Reinhard, and—what is the German for Madame?"

"Madame Reinhard does not trouble her husband to accompany her," said Claude, sternly: "they are separated."

Helen burst into an agony of tears, and rushed from the room.

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## CHAPTER LXXXI.

HELEN and Claude met no more on that day. A party was formed for the Academia and the Lido; but Helen, shut up in her own apartment, her head throbbing with pain, her eyelids swollen with tears, and her heart heavy with its burden of sorrowful and repentant thought, declined all entreaty to

accompany them. When they were gone she came into the salon, and read, and talked to Lady Augusta; but the sound of a footstep or a voice drove her back again to solitude. It is terrible, even to the most indifferent, to read in the fate of others what, but for God's mercy and protecting Providence, might, in all human probability, have been their own. The very feeling of present safety brings out in powerful contrast the danger that has been escaped. The seaman, saved from shipwreck, shudders more at the recollection of his peril when he stands firmly on dry land, and sees his comrades borne to destruction, than when he was himself buffeting with the waves; and the heart saved from the shipwreck of pure and holy principle realises the horror of its once dangerous position with an infinitely keener anguish, when, humbly clinging to God for help, it watches to the close the career of those with whom it once sympathised, than even at the moment of its first awakening to a consciousness of sin, its guilt, and its consequences. There had been much of personal feeling,—pride, disappointment, and a sense of injured dignity, in Helen's indignation when she opened her eyes to the fact of Madame Reinhard's insincerity. She was angry with her, and knew that the anger was justifiable; and this feeling hid from her, for a time, her own share in the evil which she condemned. But the perception had grown and deepened since then. Lady Augusta's illness, the anxiety and self-reproach which it caused, had sown the seed of self-knowledge; and as Helen strove, day by day, to read her own heart more truly, and serve God more perfectly, so did the veil vanish from the past, and it stood out clearly in its shame and peril.

Madame Reinhard's career might have been hers: what was there to prevent it? She had imbibed the same principles, and, as far as in her lay, carried them out to the same extent. Wilfully and knowingly, seeking only the gratifica-

tion of a wild, untamed spirit of independence, she had accepted a man whom she despised ; so had Madame Reinhard. Putting aside the consideration of the sacred promise to be made before God, that she would devote herself to the happiness of her husband, she had chosen to look upon him only as the means by which she might obtain a certain amount of worldly independence and enjoyment ; so had Madame Reinhard. Self had been her object ; and self, also, had been Madame Reinhard's. When two persons set out together on the same dangerous path, and follow it in its devious windings, and never pause to look back at the point from which they started, or the goal to which they are tending, who is to say that the Hand of God will be interposed to save one from the precipice in which it ends, while the other is allowed to rush on madly to destruction ?

Helen did not condemn Madame Reinhard, sunk though she was even in the eyes of the world. She only prayed for her ; and, in praying for her, she prayed also for herself, to be forgiven, strengthened, guided ; to be inspired with the spirit of watchfulness and self-distrust ; to be made contented under whatever cross should be in store for her : to be taught to live for the happiness of others, as she had once lived only for herself. Helen's prayers had been very earnest of late : they were never so earnest as on that long and sorrowful day.

And Susan in the meantime was happy, unconsciously yet fully happy, even though Claude still spoke of departure : and the words, " We must see what we can to-day, for to-morrow will have other engagements," were sounded in her ear from hour to hour, as though to remind her of the knell which must sooner or later be tolled for all human joys.

Claude lingered by her side, devoted himself to her in word and action ; seemed unable, except by an effort, to separate himself from her, even to pay those necessary atten-

tions to the rest of the party which in his most abstracted moments he never forgot. True he spoke of Helen, anxiously, with deep interest, which could not be distrusted; but it was the watchful interest of doubt, not the calm confidence of sympathy, with which he addressed himself to her. He talked for the first time of the days of his past happiness, and seemed desirous to explain his feelings, and to show how his love for Helen had first sprung up. His mind, indeed, rested upon that period, more than upon the present. If in any way that was alluded to, it was evident that it pained him. He looked upon Helen, apparently, as suffering for her former follies, and felt for her, and was inclined to blame himself for having in any way done her harm by his impatience and exacting temper. He had learnt wisdom, he said, since then; his danger now would be that of over-caution: what he should most require would be the absolute certainty that his affection was returned: and how was that to be obtained? and as his eyes met Susan's their glance seemed to demand from her the assurance which his lips could not venture to ask.

So passed the morning at the Academia, and Susan dwelt with a fresh and untold delight upon the beauty before her, for every sense was quickened by the enjoyment of a perfect sympathy. She had visited it often before, and now she could bear to leave much unnoticed, and give herself up to the contemplation of her peculiar favourites: Titian's wonderful "Assumption of the Blessed Virgin; and her Presentation in the Temple," and the far-famed "Paris Bordone," which tells one of the most striking incidents in Venetian history; and, perhaps better than all, the exquisite drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and his pupil Luini, which seem to embody, even more than the designs of Raphael, the spirit of purity and unearthly holiness.

The Armenian Convent and the Lido were reserved for

the evening. It was a particular request made by Claude. The gaiety of the Piazza, he said, was distasteful to him, and he wanted his last associations with Venice to be those of quietness and repose. It was the first regular announcement which he had made that his mind was fully made up upon the subject of departure. Sir Henry, subject himself to momentary fits of what he called Quixotic duty, had supposed that Claude's resolutions were of the same character; and when they were not talked about he thought they were forgotten. But he knew little of the iron rule which a mind like that of Claude exercises over itself at all moments. There was no neutral ground with him between duty and inclination. Either a thing was right to be done, or it was not: and throughout the whole of that busy day, whilst engrossed apparently in present objects, there was an under current of conflicting feeling in Claude's mind, a struggle between the strong will to remain and the duty which bade him depart, to which every word and action unconsciously had reference.

But he had decided, and had found rest. Once before, carried away by feeling, he had cast the die too soon, and the end had been fatal to his happiness. Now it seemed that a warning voice had been sent to guard him against the same danger, and on his own head would be the consequences if he chose to turn a deaf ear to it.

There was a duty which called upon him to go; not, perhaps, obviously imperative, and one which a less honest conscience might easily have put aside; but still unquestionably a duty, if there was nothing to oppose it. That was sufficient for Claude. His arrangements were made so as to excite no further discussion, and whilst waiting for the arrival of Lady Hume's party, before setting out for the Armenian Convent, he announced to Lady Augusta that he must proceed the next day to Verona. Helen was not in the room

when he said it; perhaps he might have found it more difficult to state his intentions if she had been. But Susan came to his aid, and with gentle and judicious tact managed to divert Lady Augusta's thoughts from the annoyance of Claude's departure to the prospect of soon meeting again in England.

"It is but a short time," she said; "we shall all, we hope, be at home again before very long, and then it will be such a pleasure to meet, and tell all that has been done and seen."

The observation seemed so simple and natural that Claude, who was looking at Lady Augusta, was not at all struck by it; and did not remark any change of voice. But he felt grateful to Susan, and replied very cordially, that he should look forward to that more than to anything; he could not say how different his recollections of his tour would be now, from what they would have been if he had not spent this happy fortnight in Venice.

"And it is to be the last night," said Lady Augusta, mournfully. "They won't see any thing, or go any where when you are gone, Claude; and I dare say Sir Henry's foot will become bad again; and Helen and Susan can't go about together. I want Helen to go out this evening; I shan't go, and Helen wants change. I wish she would go; I wonder why she keeps to her room; she never used to do it; I don't like it; I don't think she is well. Susan, why don't you make her come here? She must say good-bye to Claude."

Susan glanced at Claude uneasily. There was more excitement and incoherency in Lady Augusta's speech and manner, than she had lately remarked. Claude was inclined to regret his determination.

"Helen ought to come and say good-bye," repeated Lady Augusta.

"But I am not going now," said Claude, soothingly. "Even if I do leave Venice to-morrow, we shall be together

again this evening. We are only going out for an hour or two."

"I don't think it is kind of Helen not to say good-bye," persisted Lady Augusta. "She always used to have fancies, and she is very unkind to Claude; it is very wrong of her."

Claude turned pale. There was no meaning in Lady Augusta's words, but they gave him a sensation of heart-sickness.

"I will call Helen," said Susan, perceiving that Lady Augusta's mind was not likely to be set right by words.

Claude made a movement as though he would have prevented her; then he sat down silently.

Susan and Helen came back together. Helen looked very worn and unhappy; so unhappy that she had no room for any other feeling. She was extremely cold in manner, and said to Claude that she was sorry to hear he talked of going, in a tone which had no accent of sorrow in it.

"You must wish Claude good-bye, Helen," said Lady Augusta, plaintively. "He is going to leave us. It is very unkind in you to say you won't be with him the last evening."

Claude's eyes were raised eagerly to Helen's face, and his lips moved, but his words were chilled by the stiff reply: "There are so many that I should be in the way; and I have a headache."

'Not in the way, indeed, Helen," exclaimed Susan.

"Yes, indeed, very much in the way." Helen tried to smile. "I hope you will have a very pleasant row. I shall make papa take me to the Lido another evening."

"It would do your head good if you would come with us," said Claude, gently.

"Thank you, no, I shall be better at home, and I shall go to bed early; probably before you return."

Susan went to the window. "The gondola is ready,"

she said ; " Miss Hume is there : no one else. She will not come up stairs, I suppose."

" I may, perhaps, not see you again," said Claude, addressing Helen. " I think I shall be obliged to go early to-morrow." He spoke in a low voice, and almost as coldly as Helen herself, except that his eyes contradicted his lips.

Susan was moving Lady Augusta's chair, so that she might be able to see the gondola. She did not notice what was passing.

Helen's face expressed a conflict of bitter feeling. She replied to Claude's remark by giving him her icy hand, and saying : " Good-bye, I hope you will have a pleasant journey."

Claude answered nervously and eagerly : " I can't have a pleasant journey if I leave you unhappy."

" I deserve it all." The burning blush of shame crimsoned Helen's cheeks. She withdrew her hand hastily from Claude ; uttered another cold good-bye, and left him.

Easy and soothing both to body and mind was that evening's gliding voyage through the winding channels intersecting the Lagune to the tiny island on which the Armenian fathers have fixed their habitation. It is a quiet and very tempting resting-place. The white walls of the convent rise immediately out of the water, which closes around them, willing, it would seem, to shut out all sounds but those of its own gentle but ceaseless plash. The small entrance court, surrounded by a cloistered walk, and having a bright garden in the centre, speaks of study and meditation. And there is a vineyard also, where clustering leaves and delicate tendrils form arcades to shelter the long green walks beneath them from the glare of the noonday sun ; and a terrace from whence in the still summer evening the eye, weary with present objects, may turn to the buildings of Venice set in their watery frame, or wander across the Lagune to the shores of



the mainland, and find a pleasure, renewed by every passing light or flickering shadow, in the misty outline of the glorious mountains of the Southern Tyrol.

It had all been seen. The courteous father who acted as guide had displayed the treasures of the convent library, and the work of the printing-room, which is one of the chief occupations of the monks, and pointed out with proud delight the picture by Giovanni Bellino, which no sum of money would ever, he said, induce them to part with; and Claude and Susan again and again had found themselves walking apart, or lingering behind to examine some object of mutual interest, whilst both were silent,—both sad.

Once more they stopped in the little garden. The gondola was ready at the steps. Sir Henry pressed forward to place Miss Hume in it. The Armenian father accompanied them, and then returned to Susan. He gathered a rose, the last of the season, and presented it to her. It was full blown, and some of the petals fell to the ground.

Susan looked a little vexed. "I had wished to carry it home to Helen," she said to Claude.

"It should have been gathered sooner," he replied. "It has lived to be wasted."

The monk plucked another flower, and Susan accepted it gratefully; but she collected the remaining petals of her faded treasure, and as she laid them in her pocket-book, said, "I won't complain. It is a pleasant memory now; it would have been but a hope before."

Claude's countenance changed. "Yes," he said, quickly, "and a hope that might never have been fulfilled. You are right; memory is best." He walked on a few steps; then as they drew near the steps, he added, "and hopes plucked too soon leave only sad memories. It is better to be patient."

Susan's face was averted: he could not see its expression,

neither could he feel the trembling of her hand as he assisted her into the gondola. He was thinking of other things ; and bidding a kindly farewell to the courteous Armenian father, he took his seat in the boat, and rousing himself to exertion, addressed some light words to Miss Hume, and kept up an unbroken conversation with her until they landed upon the desolate shore.

Sir Henry was the first to leave the gondola. Bent upon showing his freedom and independence after his weary days of helplessness, he insisted upon taking care of Miss Hume, and rejected the idea of walking with his niece, for whom he professed a very high regard, but whom it so happened, he said, that he could see every day. So it was that, without intention on either side, Susan and Claude again found themselves walking alone and apart.

Very silent they were at first, as they passed the few poor cottages containing the only inhabitants of the barren island, and slowly made their way along a raised path by the side of a narrow canal, the banks of which were planted with Indian corn. There was nothing in the scene to excite a remark, and nothing in their own hearts which at that moment admitted of inspection. Claude especially seemed wrapt in thought, anxious, and undecided. He had the look of a man wholly engaged in solving some painful, important problem of moral conduct. When Susan at length broke the silence, almost frightened by its continuance, he started, and spoke eagerly, even impatiently. "Stormy, did you say? Yes, it looks so. So much the better for the Adriatic;" and he hurried on.

"But it will be necessary for us to turn back, won't it?" said Susan, timidly.

"Not till we have seen it,—the clear, open sea,—all the rest is but a sham. Besides,"—he suddenly checked himself, and spoke more gently,—“I have something to say—I

must say it now, if you will hear me. If I lose this moment I may have no other."

Susan's utterance was choked; but she quickened her pace. She had an indescribable longing to find herself again with her uncle and Miss Hume.

They appeared at that instant, returning from the sandy beach upon which they had looked for an instant, contented with saying that they had gazed from the Lido upon the Adriatic.

"Threatening!" said Sir Henry to Claude, as he buttoned his coat around him. "Quite a cold wind! I shall get back to the gondola. Don't stay till midnight making verses upon the waves."

Susan spoke laughingly to Miss Hume, and asked her whether she had carried away some sand for a remembrance. Such a foolish question it was! But there are times when nonsense is more useful to us than sense.

Claude drew her on. The ground was rough, and he made her take his arm, but he did not speak for some moments.

They stood upon the Lido; the long waste of sand interrupted only by the few moss-grown tombs of the Jews, and the signs of a stunted and arid vegetation, washed by the angry waters of the wide, cheerless Adriatic.

Then Claude said: "This is my last night. Must I go to-morrow without carrying hope with me? I ask you as a friend." And his gaze rested upon her with an earnestness which was agony.

Susan's eyes met his for one moment of silence, but they sank again instantly, and before a sound escaped her lips, he went on: "You know Helen perfectly; all she feels and thinks; she keeps nothing from you. You know me also—better than any one else knows me. If there is no hope, tell me."

A long pause followed. The answer came at last; very low, but calm and gentle, with all the tenderness of a woman's sympathy. "I think there is hope."

He spoke again. "A thousand blessings upon you for those words. But I am a coward. I wrecked my own happiness once, I dare not do it again. I leave my fate in your hands. When you tell me I may venture I will, but not before." He took her hand, and pressed it gratefully, affectionately, and still held it as he added: "you are afraid to speak; you think I have taken a liberty; that I am laying too much upon you."

Susan's voice never faltered, but her words were abrupt; "I will try."

"Thank you! oh! so much, so much! But I can never thank you sufficiently. I can never tell you what you have been to me; my one comfort and guiding star in this long, dreary time. I knew how it must be when you were with her: I was sure that your influence must make her what she is. And you will let me speak of yourself, too, now. You must not be angry if I say how it has gladdened me, in the midst of all my suspense, to think that you were happy." He looked at her, expecting an answer; but no sound came save the swelling moan of the rolling waters seeking rest where there was none.

Claude changed the subject with self-reproach. He thought he had intruded too far. "I shall go now," he said, "comparatively happy. I shall feel that I leave a friend and advocate behind me. Perhaps in time she will learn from you to think of me—not as a hard master, always tutoring and advising, but as one who has learnt from her lessons of unselfishness and daily endurance, which could never have been taught otherwise. I will not ask you to say that you will work for me in my absence; I feel that trust is more binding than any promise."

It might have been an echo from the moss-grown sepulchres upon the shore, which answered, "I promise." And Claude drew Susan's arm again within his, and they turned away.

The Lido was left to its solitude; and the waves lifted their crests, and as they dashed upon the beach bore back with them the light sand upon which human feet had thought to find their firm foundation; and no eye, save that of God, marked the changes which they worked; as no eye but His saw the destruction of the bright fabric of earthly joy, which, in those few moments, had crumbled into dust beside the wild shores of the Adriatic.



## CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE first, faint tinge of autumn was gathering over the woods of Ivors. There was a gleam of brightness upon the light-spreading beeches in the park, a richer hue over the close-leaved elms and the jagged foliage of the gnarled oaks. Sunshine was more glowing, but shadows were deepening. The avenue had been cleared from the few leaves scattered by a late storm, the flower garden had been carefully put in order, and late geraniums and gorgeous dahlias gave a brilliancy of colouring to the somewhat faded aspect of the closely mown turf, scorched by a long and unusual summer drought.

Men were vigorously at work in the plantations; women were weeding in different parts of the grounds; there was an appearance of energy in the movements even of the lazy boy hired by the gardener out of charity, to help to move flower-pots and put the walks of the kitchen garden in order, because Sir Henry Clare was to be at home immediately.

People said Sir Henry, not Lady Augusta, as they used to do. Those days of strict superintendence were over, and rumour, always eager with its fatal news, said that Lady Augusta was returning worse, instead of better; that a cold, caught by some accidental exposure to night air, had partially brought back the fever which had first broken her down, and that it was no question of recovery with her now; that she might live, but that life could never be enjoyment either to herself or her friends; and that the most probable expectation was, that with her strength so weakened, she would sink rapidly in body as well as in mind.

The report might be exaggerated, but it was certain that all directions were given without reference to Lady Augusta, except that some few careful instructions were sent by Miss Clare as to the arrangement of the rooms which were specially appropriated to her use.

The butler and the footman were standing together at the front door, straining their eyes to look down the avenue. At the same moment a gentleman was seen walking leisurely towards the house, and the butler, with an exclamation which showed that he was too proud to receive any but his own master, turned into the house and left his companion to announce to Claude Egerton that Sir Henry was not yet arrived, but was expected every moment.

Claude entered, but stopped to ask more questions. "Sir Henry, you said. Is he coming alone? He wrote me word that I was to be here to meet the whole party."

"Oh, no, sir! My Lady, and Miss Clare, and Miss Graham are all expected; that is, I believe Miss Graham goes to Wingfield to-night. A fly has been sent for her, as they don't pass through the town; and is waiting."

"Mrs. Graham is not here then?"

"No, sir,—no one. Will you go into the library? we have had a fire lighted there: we thought my Lady might be

chilly." And Claude went to the library, and sat down in the arm-chair by the fire, and looked round the room and thought of other days.

That sameness in outward and inanimate things,—what a bitter mockery it presents to the changes in the circumstances and feelings of the living being! There was the room, unaltered, except that it had lost the appearance of being in constant use. The books were laid regularly in order, the pens were new, the inkstand was perfectly bright, and the chairs were placed symmetrically. There was not the comfortable look of business which had pervaded it in the days of Lady Augusta's health and strength. But the oval table in the window was still covered with pamphlets and papers, the large work-basket stood in its old place, and the Bohemian flower vase had been filled by the gardener with the best selection which his taste could make; and without there were the same trees and shrubs, only some a little increased in size, and the deep glades admitting the slanting, sunset rays, and beyond them the heavy masses of wood, and the blue mist hanging over the distant town. Only the spirit was wanting; and how had that fled!

Claude went back in thought through many years. It seemed that he could trace now the course of Lady Augusta's life,—her principles and objects; they were so mixed up with his own, that, in thinking of her, he was thinking of himself; and at that moment, unselfish though he was, his own position, his own hopes and fears, claimed instinctively and peremptorily his full consideration. He dwelt upon the remembrance of his boyish visits to Ivors, the impression they had made upon him, his perception of Helen's faults, and the prejudice which had lingered in his mind in consequence. He had judged her hardly then: looking back, he could see the germs of those noble qualities which trial and disappointment had since developed. But he had been repelled

from the beginning, even when he did not understand his own feelings, by Lady Augusta's evident manœuvring. And then his mind recurred to that time of excitement, delusion, unreality which had followed; he could not explain it to himself or account for it. But he had the consciousness of having been led on, deceived, and of Helen's having been deceived likewise. Lady Augusta's interference had rendered them false to each other and to themselves; for Claude blamed himself as much as he was forced to blame Helen. He could see now his own blindness,—how he had lived in a world of shadows. His present feelings were quite different from those which had formerly so entranced him; so much calmer, so much more resigned to God's Will, even in this moment of wearying suspense. There had been a sense of insecurity then, even when his hopes were brightest. He had always feared to approach too near to Helen lest his eyes should be opened to the truth; he would not look at her as she was, and he had suffered the fatal consequences of his own wilful errors. Now he felt that he was treading upon firm ground; he had no misgiving, except as to the possibility of his affection being returned; and, as the pang of doubt was felt, Claude drew forth from his pocket-book a note in the handwriting of Susan Graham. It said: "You may be at Ivors: I think you will be happy. It is difficult to convince her that you can overlook the past; but I have made her feel that it is possible. When that barrier is removed her heart will be free, and you will say for yourself what no one can say for you."

"S. G."

There was no delusion in this. Helen knew herself, and Claude knew her likewise. If she would consent to be his, they might pass through life together, mutually strengthening each other, and loving all the more deeply and truly,



because both could see and acknowledge that love in this world is not perfection, but probation.

Claude said this to himself, and thought himself calm and prepared for any disappointment; but, as the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the avenue, he sank back in his chair with a sensation of faint heart sickness, and, covering his face with his hands, prayed with the earnestness of a soul overwhelmed with the anguish of an intolerable suspense, that God would bear him up, for he had no power in himself.

The footman looked into the library on his way to the hall. "They are come, sir; I don't know whether you heard the bell;" and Claude obeyed the summons and followed.

Sir Henry jumped out of the carriage and grasped his hand eagerly. "Claude, my dear fellow, indeed this is kind—home-like!" Sir Henry's eyes glistened, and his voice was husky; he glanced for an instant at Lady Augusta, and hurried on a few steps without noticing the servants, and then returned again; and gently pushing Claude aside, said, "I'll manage, I'll manage; she will be more at home with me: she's sadly changed."

He lifted his wife to the ground, and motioned to the servants to move aside. Claude did not offer to assist; Lady Augusta's faltering step and vacant glance told their own tale; he could not venture to intrude upon her. Helen and Susan were standing by the door of the carriage, looking for parcels. Claude did not know whether they had seen him; he asked if he could help them. Helen kept her face averted, apparently not hearing. Susan turned towards him.

Change! what change could be like that? The hollow indentation of the cheek, and the marked sallow lines around the pale lips, and the swollen eyelids, weary with the effort

to shut out all sight of earth, and underneath them the haziness of the dark full eyes, over which the long lashes drooped, as though the brain were so worn with thought, that one longing only was left to it, even the craving for a sleep that should know no waking. It was Susan Graham's wraith, not herself, until she spoke. Then there was the gentle voice, full of sweet womanly tenderness, with its undertone of depth and power; and across the haggard face passed a smile, not brilliant, indeed, like Helen's sunshiny, summer beauty, but bright with the touching gladness of the light which breaks through a wintry cloud, and bids us hope, even against hope, because, so God has willed, that our true joy on earth should be realised "by faith, and not by sight."

Claude started when he saw Susan. His first impulse was to ask if she had been ill; but she stopped him before the question was uttered, and giving him her hand, said, "You will be a comfort to them all." The next moment she withdrew herself from the warm grasp by which he strove to detain her, and walked on, following Lady Augusta, and none would have marked a trace of effort or self-control, except in the rigid compression of her colourless lips.

"You will allow me to take these things for you," said Claude to Helen.

She could not avoid hearing him then, and she turned round and gave him a basket and some books, and laughed nervously, as she said it was impossible to welcome him, for her hands were full.

"I don't need a welcome," he said; "if I am only allowed to be here."

Helen quickened her steps, and led the way to the library.

It was empty.

She glanced round the room, and went up to the oriel window, and sitting down in the window seat, pressed her face against the pane of glass, as though to shut in the tears, which would fain have escaped.

"It is a sad return," said Claude, tenderly, as he stood behind her. "But, Helen, there must still be hope."

"None," said Helen, and she looked at him firmly, and added, "this last attack has wrecked her completely. Poor papa!"

"And you won't think of yourself?"

"I have thought of myself too much," she said, whilst a faint smile glanced across her face. "Even now I ought to be with her."

"Stay, one moment, stay;" he laid his hand upon her arm, as she rose. "Helen, will you allow no one to comfort you?"

"God will and can," said Helen. "I wish to look only to Him."

"But he sends us earthly friends. He allows some the privilege of offering comfort."

"Yes, some who have the right," said Helen, quickly; and again she would have moved.

"And I have it not; but I had it once."

Helen shuddered, and her limbs trembled. She leaned against the window seat.

"I may have it again," continued Claude, passionately, "if—oh, Helen, grant it, and I ask no other earthly happiness."

"You have tried it, and it has failed," said Helen, and her voice faltered.

"Failed, because we did not know each other; because I was exacting."

"And because I was—what I am and always shall be," said Helen, bitterly. "Claude, Claude, you forget that I have wronged you."

"Love cancels every debt," said Claude; and he took her unresisting hand in his. And Helen burst into tears, and murmured, "It is all I have to offer."

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CHAPTER LXXXIII.

It was nearly dark when a fly drove up to the entrance of Wingfield Court; almost before it had reached the door, eager eyes were looking out, and loving voices uttered their words of welcome.

"My precious child!" and Susan, as she threw herself into her mother's arms, felt that warm kiss of unspeakable, holy, unselfish affection, for which, when it is taken from us, we pine in the hour of our lonely sorrow, as the pilgrim pines for the water in the desert.

"Isabella, dearest, you look so well." Susan's accent was so full of sympathising pleasure and congratulations, that her sisters, in their delight at her return, could trace in it no undertone of heaviness. Anna drew her into the study. "See, we have had a fire lighted for you, you are such a chilly mortal. Now, let us look at you;" and Susan was unwillingly turned towards the light.

"She does n't look well," said Isabella, gravely.

And Mrs. Graham took Susan's trembling hand in both hers, and in a voice which she vainly tried to render calm, said: "My darling, you should have told us you had been ill."

"No, indeed, indeed;"—Susan laughed—oh! such a hard laugh!—"we have been travelling rather fast the last week, and Lady Augusta has been very ill, and made every one anxious. I want rest, I shall do quite well then; indeed, I only want rest. Now, Isabella, tell me everything about home."

Home meant "everything about yourself;" but Isabella could not make her confession before so many, and she only put her arm round her sister, and said: "I am very happy,"—and the large tears glistened in her eyes. But there were no tears in Susan's; only a quiet, fixed look which seemed to show that she had a difficulty in understanding even her own words. Mrs. Graham would not appear to watch her. She asked questions about Helen and Lady Augusta, and the journey, and conversed about home matters, and by degrees drew Isabella out, and helped her over her first shyness, and made Anna talk about little things which happened in the neighbourhood; and when the sisters seemed to have satisfied their first eager curiosity and excitement, she said: "This poor child wants quiet, so she shall go and lie down in her own room a little, and then we will have tea, and after tea Martha shall unpack for her."

"Not yet, mamma. Susan, you have n't heard half; you must n't go yet," said Anna, trying to detain her.

And Isabella kissed her, and added, that it was hard to lose sight of her even for half an hour.

But Susan did not say she wished to stay; she moved mechanically till she reached the door, and then she turned round and smiled, and said: "We must talk all the evening, I am tired now;" and followed her mother up stairs."

"Anna wanted to have your little room new-papered whilst you were away, my child," said Mrs. Graham, as she opened the door of Susan's apartment; "but I thought you should have your own choice; and I fancied too, that you would like to see it just the same.

"Thank you, yes; no change;—I don't want any change." Susan sat down at the foot of the bed.

"Only rest, my darling. Will you try and get some now?"

"I don't know. Oh! mamma, mamma, is it really home?"

Susan's eye wandered round the room, and she grasped her mother's hand tightly.

"Really home, my own child ; with so many, many hearts to love you ! You will feel the quietness of it'soon ; you have had too much anxiety and excitement."

"Quiet ! Oh yes, it will be very quiet," said Susan ; "and I want that. Mamma, you won't let me go from you again." The tone of sorrowful entreaty went to her mother's heart.

"My child, how can you ask me ? I have longed for you every hour of your absence,—but I felt,—I hoped you were happy." Mrs. Graham fixed her eyes earnestly on Susan's face, and unable to bear the glance, Susan turned away, and said, quickly : "I was happy ; I enjoyed it all very much, at first."

"But at last, when Lady Augusta became so ill, there could have been nothing but anxiety ; only you must have been such a comfort to Helen."

"I hope I was,—I don't know." Susan trembled violently.

"Are you uneasy about her ? Is there anything amiss ?" asked Mrs. Graham, anxiously.

"Oh ! no, no ; she is very good ; and she will be quite happy. Mamma," and Susan turned round suddenly, and her voice became strangely firm, yet hollow, "she will marry Mr. Egerton."

The quickness of a mother's insight ! It is a second prophecy, for in those few words the vague dread of years was realised. Mrs. Graham drew Susan towards her, and whispered : "God help you, my darling,"—and Susan, throwing herself on her knees, hid her face in her mother's lap, and murmured, shuddering : "Hate me, mamma ; I deserve it ; I am wicked ; I am not worthy to be with you."

"God sees no sin, my precious one, in the feelings which He gives us, unless they are wrongly indulged"

"They are wrong, they must be;" Susan lifted up her haggard face, and her look was wild in its agony; "he did not think of me; he never, never cared for me. But I thought,—oh! indeed, I thought,—I would not have dwelt upon it,—I would have left everything. Mamma, you think,—you know I would. Oh! it is so terrible, so terrible."

"My child, God will help you in this, none else can. He sees it was not meant."

"He knows I would have Helen happy, and I tried;—mamma, I tried. It was left to me, and I said all I could, and I bore up. Helen thought as I did; she told me so. It was one night,—the night Lady Augusta was taken ill,—she told me that he had been more to me than to her, and she could not think he cared for her. And I said it plainly,—I would not let my voice change; I told her that I was nothing to him; and then—Oh! mother, mother, let me die;" and Susan's voice grew faint, and her hands dropped powerless by her side.

Mrs. Graham drew her towards the bed and laid her gently upon it; her lips parted into a feeble smile, but there were no tears of relief, no softening of the stony gaze of anguish; and still she kept her mother's hand in hers, and murmured, "Sinful, sinful! save me, mother, save me!"

"The feelings which God would not have called sinful if it had been His will to bless them, cannot be sinful in His sight because He sees good to disappoint them, my darling. He has sent you a trial, not a punishment."

"But I indulged them. I ought to have seen. I was blind, because I wished it," continued Susan: "and now—oh! mamma, mamma! if they were not sinful then, they are now; and I have them, I can't escape from them." She covered her face with her hands.

"My child! the future must be left to God. I have no misgivings. It would be a wicked want of faith to doubt

that He will enable you to overcome everything. You have done so, already. He sees, and I see, that you have acted nobly."

"No, never, never," exclaimed Susan. "Mamma, I said the truth to Helen; I don't know how; I scarcely knew what I said; but the horrible feeling, the jealousy was there still. I thought I was not jealous; and—I don't know,"—she paused for a moment, and gazing piteously in her mother's face, murmured,—“if he had said once, only once, that he loved me, I think I could have given him to Helen and been happy."

And then came a torrent of impetuous, overwhelming tears, and the heavy-laden heart seemed for a while to have found relief.

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## CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THERE followed a weary time,—days of anxious care and nights of watching. The deep stream which bends its quiet course through the smooth meadows, gathers force from the fulness of its unwasted powers, and when at length it is roused into energy, has an overwhelming strength unknown to the fretting, tossing waters which have chased their way over rocks and stones, and turned aside at every obstacle to wear for themselves new channels, expending their eagerness in foam and bubble.

Susan Graham had been called cold, sometimes she had even called herself so. The things which excited others had but little power over her; the harassing annoyances which rendered others miserable, were regarded by her as matters of indifference. Even the enjoyments of life were received by her calmly; she was never roused to ecstasy, and had but



few impulses of enthusiasm. Her deepest feelings were known, even to herself, chiefly by the effort made to control them; for her smiles were given to her fellow-creatures, whilst her tears were reserved for God; and that which we pour forth before Him we are little able to realise to ourselves.

So it was that not even Mrs. Graham, with all her loving perception of her daughter's character, was fully prepared for the effect which one great shock might produce. She had known that Susan might, and probably would, love intensely, if ever the feeling were awakened at all, but she had calculated upon the habitual self-restraint, the daily and hourly watchfulness which had been her child's characteristic almost from infancy, to guard her against the possibility either of a misplaced or an exaggerated affection. The circumstances which had actually occurred had been, if not entirely unforeseen, at least quite beyond her control. It was a thought to which she was compelled continually to recur, in order to keep her mind in its right balance, as she sat by Susan's bedside, watching the wasting of continual fever, listening to the half-penitent, half agonized confessions of the sorrowful and broken heart, and marking the struggles for resignation, and the conflict with haunting memories and natural feelings, which the sensitive conscience condemned.

In the utter prostration of her physical powers, Susan had become like a little child. She had not strength to be reserved, and little by little, by broken sentences and passing observations, and often by the doubtful questionings of a heart busy with self-upbraiding, and touched in that tenderest point of womanly feeling, which, if it is once wounded, can never be entirely healed, she revealed the story of her life.

Who was to blame? Mrs. Graham's first thought turned upon herself. Long, long before, the dread of such a catas-

trophe had crossed her mind : but could she by any step of her own have averted it ? She might have refused to join the Admiral in London, and so have kept Claude and Susan apart ; but her duty at that time was to minister to the old man's comfort ; and Claude was absorbed in politics ; and Susan's feelings had been nipped in the bud by his avowed preference for Helen. She had no right to conjure up a very unlikely and remote evil, and allow it to interfere with a present duty. The journey abroad had been planned and carried out without reference to Claude, and solely out of kindness to Helen. The very fact that Susan was with her cousin would, at first sight, have rendered it wholly improbable that she should have been thrown in the way of Claude. No human power had planned that meeting. If blame could be attached to any person, it must be to Claude ; and Mrs. Graham would have blamed him bitterly almost unpardonably, but for a note received from Helen, the day after her return ; announcing her own happiness, and anxiously inquiring for Susan, and begging to be allowed to see her. She spoke in it of Isabella's approaching marriage, and said that she had taken a great liberty in mentioning it to Claude ; but that she had found he was under a false impression as regarded Susan, thinking that the engagement was hers ; and as the thing seemed now generally known, she had thought it better to set him right. The mistake was mentioned in the simplest, most matter-of-fact way ; for it was a matter of indifference to Helen, except that she would have cared much more for Susan's prospects of happiness than she did for Isabella's : but to Mrs. Graham it afforded an interpretation of Claude's conduct, which removed the weight as of a mountain from her heart. Whether his manner and his words had always been wise and prudent, she could not judge ; for she had not been a witness to them. But she could well understand the ease and freedom, which the idea

that Susan's affections were engaged, had given him. At least, he had not intentionally, or even carelessly, trifled with her feelings; he was still what she had always thought him; and with this clue Mrs. Graham threw aside every painful misgiving, and bore patiently the details which Susan in her candour and simplicity unintentionally revealed, and which had been the means of fatally wrecking her happiness.

They were sitting together one evening about three weeks after Susan's return. The fever was subdued; and, for the first time, she had been carried from her bed and laid upon a sofa by the window. It was warm for the beginning of September, and the flowers on the table, which were daily sent from Ivors, gave a cheerful summer look to the little room; although the view from it was not of trees and fields, but of the lane which divided the garden of Wingfield Court from the town.

"I did not mean to return and be a burden," said Susan, as she laid her wasted hand upon her mother's. "I thought I should come back and help to prepare everything for Isabella's wedding; but I am only a drawback."

"Isabella will not have to wait longer than she first expected," said Mrs. Graham. "We always talked of three months. You will be strong, I trust, by that time, my darling." She looked at Susan uneasily.

"I mean to be well, mamma; that is, if it please God. I wish to be." There was a pause, and Susan added: "I try to wish it."

Mrs. Graham kissed her tenderly. "You must wish it for my sake, my child. What should I do without you?"

"Yes; I think of that. I could not live, at least, I think not, without that feeling."

"Or without the feeling of being a comfort to some one," said Mrs. Graham.

"Some one," repeated Susan, and she faintly smiled; "that was the first lesson I remember when I was quite a tiny child; that I was to be a comfort to some one. I did not think then that it could ever be difficult. I fancied I was a comfort to every one."

"And you have been, my darling. No one has done more in a short life to make others happy than you have."

"It seems nothing now," said Susan; "and mamma,——" and the struggling anguish dimmed her eyes;—"the power seems all gone."

"But it will come again. We want peace and rest ourselves, and then we can give it to others."

"Rest, rest," murmured Susan. She turned her head away, and a convulsive shudder passed over her, as she added in a voice scarcely audible: "If I could forget! if it were not sinful!"

"My child, we have talked of that before: we won't return to it now; it is not a thought for reason, you must banish it."

"But it comes, it haunts me," said Susan, and she fixed her hollow eyes upon her mother imploringly. "When I go to sleep, it is there; and when I wake up in the night it comes to me as the first thought, and everything brings it back to me. Mamma,—you know it,"—she caught Mrs. Graham's hand, "he would think it sinful; he would despise me. Sometimes, oh! I have such a wild, wild fancy; that I must go to him and tell him all, and hear him say that he loathes me; and then that I would hide myself somewhere far off, and no one should hear my name again."

"You are ill, my darling, that is one cause of all this; you have no power to reason justly. Sinful feelings are those which we wilfully indulge, knowing, or even suspecting, that they are contrary to the law of God. Where there was no law, there could have been no sin. But no power of ar-

gument will teach you this now ; only when the wild fancy comes, remember that you may say it all to God, and that will help you more than any acknowledgment to man."

" I pray, indeed I pray," said Susan, " when I can ; but my thoughts wander back, and I seem too wicked to be heard."

" But even if you can't pray, if your thoughts seem quite incoherent, yet say them to God. We may speak to Him when we have scarcely the power to pray, because we have not strength to wish."

" And He will forgive ;" said Susan, doubtfully. " But the feelings won't go. Mamma ! mamma ! what shall I do if they don't ?"

" They will go, my child. God sends a blessing with time, which we can never understand as we look forward."

" But if I don't want them to go ?" said Susan, and her look for a moment was eager and imploring ; and then the whole expression of her face changed, and she tried to hide her face with her thin hands, as she said in a hollow voice : " Mamma, I cannot part with the memory ; it is my all."

" My darling one, that will be your trial ; the bitter, bitter trial. But oh ! Susan, is there anything with which one would not part for God ?"

Susan was silent. Her mother saw the trembling of her whole frame, and the large drops which, as she turned aside her head, forced their way down her wasted cheeks. For a moment the long fingers were clasped together convulsively ; and then Susan looked round again, and a faint smile lit up her face, and she said : " Mamma, I have asked Him to take it from me."

" My own child, I knew you would have strength for the prayer. Yet I can tell, oh ! so much better than you may think, the struggle it must cost to think that it will be granted."

"I have thought," said Susan, "that I might live with memory. Even lately, as I have been lying here at times alone, I have let my mind go back, and then there was rest; no, not rest, but something better than rest,—something,—mamma ——" she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and whispered, "if I might only love him still in my dreams!"

Mrs. Graham rested the weary head on her shoulder, and whispered: "Our Lord gave up all for us, Susan. There was nothing withheld, not even His Father's love."

"Yes, all, all; mamma, I will try." And there was a long silence; but Susan laid her head back again on her pillow, and said quickly: "Will life be very long?"

"As long as God wills; and He has work for us to do."

"I have no power now for work," said Susan.

"Only the power to struggle," replied Mrs. Graham.

"But there is no work so great as that."

"For oneself, yes. But I was so vain, so proud. I thought I did not need any care for myself; and now there is no one else whom I can do anything for."

"My darling, you cannot see how God is dealing with you; the work for which he is preparing you. May I tell you; can you bear to hear what I think that may be; if it should please Him that you should never marry?"

"To live for you; to love you, and comfort you, and be more to you than ten thousand Ruths could have been to Naomi; never, never, to leave you, my own sweet mother," exclaimed Susan, passionately; and holding Mrs. Graham's hand in hers, she added: "I can bear anything for you."

"Yes, to be with me always, I trust, my child," replied Mrs. Graham; "to be my blessing and comfort unspeakable. But not to live for me only. This is a dreary world, Susan, and there are many lonely and aching hearts to be found in it; and but few to comfort them, because so many have found their own homes of happiness, and live in their own

circles, and finding all their duties and their sympathies within, have no leisure to attend to the claims without. We must not for a moment condemn them. God has appointed them their place, and there is very much that is good and holy in these deep concentrated affections. But there are some whom he has seen fit to set free from such exclusive ties. He has given them hearts as large—feelings as deep—but there is no one earthly channel into which they may exclusively flow. Yet He must have a purpose for those feelings; and it seems as though he wills them, not to sink and deepen, but to expand.”

“But they do not,” said Susan. “We are all selfish.”

“Not all,” said Mrs. Graham. “I know that many will not acknowledge what I say, and when they find themselves shut out from what they have accustomed themselves to consider the great happiness of life, they allow their affections to become chilled, and exhaust all their energies upon self, and self-gratification. But I can never believe that this is a necessary consequence of their lot. Rather, I feel that they must have been intended to fill up all the blanks and hollows which are left between the circles of married life; to spread themselves out in sympathy with griefs and cares which can find no echo and no comfort elsewhere. That, my darling, I can imagine to be your work on earth. God has given you a very loving, tender nature, and a truth of character which naturally inspires confidence; and so I can fancy you going through life like one of those clear streams which we sometimes see winding through a barren country, its course tracked by the bright greenness of its banks. You were born to be a blessing, Susan. And if God wills that you should learn your work more surely by the experience of suffering, you will not murmur.”

“Mamma, no indeed; but the suffering is selfish; it can do no good to any but myself, and I have borne it so miserably.”

"All suffering is selfish, except as we make use of it for others," said Mrs. Graham. "But even our past sins may be turned into blessings, if we will, by teaching us how to guard others against them. Dear child! you know very little of the world, but if God should spare your life, I cannot but feel certain that you will, by and by, recognise fully all that He is doing for you now; teaching you lessons of tenderness, opening your heart to understand feelings, which might otherwise have been judged hardly. If even our Blessed Lord Himself vouchsafed to learn sympathy by the experience of sorrow, surely we may be thankful to do the same."

"And the loneliness," said Susan, in a low voice; and tears stood in her eyes, and were kept down by a strong effort, as she added, "Mamma, that is so wicked, when I have you."

"*My* love will not satisfy you, my darling. I would rather you should face the truth at once, unshrinkingly. A void has been created in our hearts which only one kind of earthly love can entirely fill. God has willed to deny you that,"—and Mrs. Graham passed her hand fondly over Susan's forehead, and stooped to kiss her colourless cheek,— "but He has not willed that you should go through life in loneliness. There is another love, before which all human affection fades into nothingness."

"God's love," said Susan; "I thought once that I understood it; but I don't now."

"You do, though you cannot realise it."

Susan shook her head mournfully, as she answered, "I gave myself to an earthly affection, and God took His love from me."

"No, my darling, never. God allowed you to feel what an earthly affection might be, and withdrew it that you might give your heart in its full strength to Him. Only be patient



with yourself, and the blessing will come. As you learn to strengthen and quicken your feelings by living in the happiness of your fellow creatures, the weight which keeps your heart from rising to God will be removed, and then you will know how fully that deep spirit of devotion can satisfy every need."

"It ought; it would with others," said Susan.

"It ought with all; but it does not," replied Mrs. Graham, "because persons make it second, where it ought to be first. God's love is a jealous love. He will give us only what we seek. If we are contented with our earthly ties, and merely think of Him gratefully, as the author of our enjoyment, we may be what is called religious,—that is, we may be very careful in all our duties, we may be excellent wives, and mothers, and children, but we shall never know what the real blessedness of religion is. That is the danger of married life, Susan, where it is perfectly happy; it may be—of course I do not say it will be—so satisfying, that the feeling given to God is, in comparison, cold. If it is not so satisfying, we may be well contented to do without it, and take in its stead that which God offers,—a love which can never change, never misunderstand, which waits for us when our hearts are chilled, and deepens as they are faint and sad; which is more fond than the love of a husband, more watchful than the care of a parent, and sympathised with us before we understood the affection of sisters or of brothers; a real, earnest, living, intense love, and to which we may give, not mere duty, or reverence, or gratitude, but the warm, eager, absorbing affection, which is infinite as the craving of our hearts, and lasting as the blessedness of eternity."

Mrs. Graham paused. Susan laid her hand gently on her mother's, and said, "I am better now, mamma. Will you read me some prayers?"

And the prayers were said; and when they were ended

Susan remained quiet for a little time, and then sent for Isabella, and talked to her of her new home, and even read some letters from Mr. Berry; and when she left her, heard her say, "There is no one so dear as Susan; she throws herself into every person's business exactly as if it were her own."

That was the first effort and the first reward.

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## CHAPTER LXXXV.

HOURS pass very slowly in illness, yet they passed too quickly for Mrs. Graham's comfort. Her outward attention was often given to Isabella, but her secret thoughts were centred in Susan. Day by day, as she marked the progress made in the recovery of her child's bodily health, the wreck of her happiness became more visible. Every thing was an effort; all duties had lost their interest. Whilst Susan was able to keep to her own room the burden had been comparatively light, for she was able to give herself rest in her own way; but for the first few days that she came down stairs again and mixed with the family, the perpetual exertion seemed at times more than she could bear. Yet she kept up wonderfully upon the whole; and entered at once into all that was going on, and made little plans of duty or of pleasure for others, and even for herself; especially showing herself watchful for Isabella's happiness, and giving her those little marks of tender sympathy which touch the heart and induce it to open itself freely; and Mrs. Graham could not but see that the hours of weakness which Susan spent on her sofa were likely to work more for Isabella's good than many years of previous training.

But Susan never spoke of herself now. In the first agony of a great grief we can all be unreserved ; but when sorrow has settled itself into its place, and made for itself the home in our memories in which it must dwell till death, we can no longer bear that the eye of a fellow-creature should gaze upon it.

Susan was quite changed ; yet it was not a change which even her sisters could comment upon. She had a kind word, a smile, an affectionate thought for them continually. If the interest was not awakened spontaneously, it was at least so genuine in its nature that none had cause to complain. Only one thing was remarked by Anna,—that although Helen's re-engagement was fully known, Susan had never yet expressed any curiosity as to the time fixed for the wedding, and had hitherto shunned the idea of seeing her cousin ; saying always that she would wait till she felt stronger ; that Helen knew her so well, she could not possibly think it unkind.

But the effort must be made shortly ; and Mrs. Graham knew that the longer it was delayed the more trying it would be. Besides, events were hastening on. Lady Augusta was in a state from which she was not likely to rally, but in which she might linger long. Helen had at first utterly rejected the idea of leaving her, but even Sir Henry was urgent that there should be no delay. Helen could be little or no comfort to Lady Augusta, who was now only occasionally conscious of her presence, and had never been made to understand the fact of her engagement ; and for himself, heavy-hearted though he was, yet there was something of brightness and hope in the thought of Helen's marriage with Claude to which he clung as to the one remaining prospect of earthly interest. He might be alone at Ivors, but there would be Helmsley to look to for change and society, and perhaps, by and by,—his sanguine spirit wandered into the future with a

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strange tenacity of happiness,—he might give up Ivors to Maurice, who was very likely to marry, and then he could be with Claude and Helen in his old age.

And so Sir Henry put aside his present griefs as well as he could, and talked to Helen of her wedding, as he might have done in the brighter days, when it had seemed to realise all that he or Lady Augusta could desire for herself or for them.

He called to see Mrs. Graham on the very day that everything was settled. It was quite necessary to him to talk to some one; and Helen and Claude were gone out together, and Maurice, who was expected, had not yet arrived; and so he made it a matter of duty to go himself to Wingfield, and tell his sister-in-law all that had been arranged, and ask for her advice. He had a scheme, too, in his head which he thought admirable. Helen must have some lady with her, and no one could be so proper as her aunt; and it was his plan that Mrs. Graham should remove to Ivors several days before the wedding, that she might superintend everything and be a comfort to Helen. And then it would be so pleasant, he thought, for the cousins to be together. Helen and Susan were quite like sisters, and it would be really hard for them to be parted at the last; and the change might do poor Susan good. He had not seen her since her illness; and he fancied she was suffering from over exertion and anxiety about Lady Augusta, and so considered himself doubly bound to think about her and be careful for her.

In the fulness of his heart, Sir Henry proposed his scheme to Isabella and Anna, whom he found sitting alone in the drawing-room, the study having been given up to Susan.

"Where is your mamma, my dear? I have a great deal to talk to her about; can't she come to me? we are going to have a wedding soon, you know, at Ivors;" and for a moment poor Sir Henry's face brightened, and then grew

sad again as he added, "It is not what it might have been; but we don't allow ourselves to complain. God knows best how these things should be. I want to have you all over there."

"Is it to be very soon?" said Isabella. "I am afraid Susan will not be strong enough."

"Oh! but we shall make her strong. The change will be everything to her; we had a very trying time the last week of our journey! I have never quite made up my mind, whether Markham was right in sending us abroad; but any how it is too late to think of that now. I should like to see Susan very much. Is she in the study, did you say?"

He rose and went to the door.

"Please wait. I am not sure," said Isabella, rather nervously, as she followed him; but his hand had touched the lock.

"Frances, Susan; any admittance for an elderly gentleman?"

Before Mrs. Graham could answer, Susan's voice was heard, saying "Uncle Henry! yes, please come;" and the tone was so bright and affectionate, that Sir Henry stepped forward eagerly, quite forgetting her illness.

He was reminded of it, though painfully. At the first glance he started back. "What, Susan! You never told me, Frances, what was the matter. You have been listening to those Wingfield doctors, who are only fit to dose horses." He sat down by Susan, and took up her hand and examined it. "Bad work this, my poor child; but it must not go on; you must have a change. Frances, you must bring her to Ivors; and we'll have Markham down to see her. He's coming next week to Lady Augusta."

"Thank you, very much; but I fancy time and mamma will be the best doctors," said Mrs. Graham, trying to smile. "Considerable progress has been made the last week."

"It must be a snail's progress backwards, then," said Sir Henry. "Why, the poor child could not look much worse if she was dying. No, no, Frances; you must take her away from this place. Town air is always unwholesome, and I can't get the commissioners to look to Wingfield as they might, and you have a very unhealthy population near you in the back streets."

"I dare say change may be good, by and by," said Mrs. Graham, unwilling to chill him by refusing his kindness.

"By and by won't suit me so well as just now," said Sir Henry. "You know I was always rather given to selfishness, Frances; and I confess that when I cast a stone, I like to kill a bird for myself, as well as my neighbour. Claude and Helen, you know, have made it up together, and are talking of being married in another three weeks."

"So soon!" Mrs. Graham glanced at Susan, but she lay quite still, with her gaze riveted on one spot on the wall.

"It seems soon; but the fact is,—of course I can say it all out to you, being quite sure that you will understand,—Poor Lady Augusta's state is very precarious. Markham says things may go on as they are for another year; they may all come to an end in a few months, or even less. Now Helen was very uneasy, and talked of waiting, and in fact would have insisted upon it, if I would have allowed it; but I felt that, under the circumstances, delays were worse than dangerous; and Claude has had such a weary time, and behaved really so nobly, that it seemed cruel to keep him longer hanging between heaven and earth. So I overruled all her scruples, and put forward my own plan, that the marriage should be as soon as possible, and quite quiet, just yourselves, and the Humes, and Julia Manners. No one else, except, perhaps, some of Claude's cousins. Then, when they are married, if matters should take an uncomfortable turn at Ivors, Helen can be there at any moment. It won't really

make any difference, except as to Claude's happiness. Poor fellow ! he is desperately in love, worse now than ever ; and to do Helen justice, I believe she is nearly as bad. Susan my dear, do I talk too fast for you ? ”

Susan had moved her head away from the light.

“ She has not yet become accustomed to visitors,” said Mrs. Graham ; but Susan turned round quickly, and touched her uncle's arm, as he was going to rise, and said, “ I should like to hear all.”

“ All is not much,” continued Sir Henry, reseating himself, with evident willingness ; “ but since you like to hear, I will just tell you in a few words what has been settled.”

“ They must be very few, then,” observed Mrs. Graham.

“ Indeed, I can bear it quite well,” said Susan, whilst her voice assumed a peculiar tone of firmness.

“ I won't tire you, my dear, I will take care. They talk of being married on the sixteenth, Wednesday three weeks ; then they go for a short tour in Scotland. It is rather late in the year for the north, but Claude wants to visit some relations. Afterwards they are to settle themselves at Helmsley ; and as Claude may be obliged to be in London at the end of the year, Helen talks of coming to us for a little while. However, I don't look forward ; God knows what may happen before then. All I think of is the present moment.”

“ And that seems tolerably bright, I hope,” said Mrs. Graham, moving her chair, as a hint that he should go.

“ Yes ; very fairly so. As much so as we have a right to expect. But I must have you at Ivors, Frances ; I can't get on without you.”

“ I would be there for the day, certainly ; but you see I have claims at home. Isabella means to follow Helen's example ; and there is my poor child here.”

“ Ah ! Isabella, how selfish one is ! I quite forgot to ask about her.”

"It is a very quiet matter-of-fact affair with her," Mrs. Graham. "There have been very few difficulties. and Mr. Berry have known each other a long time; and believe he has never really cared for any one else, neither she, and so they have made a very comfortable engagement and I look forward thankfully to seeing her married settled as a clergyman's wife at East Dudden. They will be rich, but they will have a competency, and I am quite satisfied with him as Isabella's husband, though he will not have suited every one."

"Not you, Susan, I suppose that means," said Sir Henry. "I always thought mamma looked upon you as the flower of her flock. But she was taught to do that. The poor Admiral! what a pet he made of her, Frances!"

Susan's lips were closely compressed together for a seconds, and then the aching heart could bear the anguish no longer, and she cried bitterly.

Sir Henry was very much distressed. He did not know what he had done, or how. He could only kiss her, and when she was ill and wanted change, and that she must come to Ivors. Claude and Helen would both be charmed to see her. There was no one scarcely whom Claude esteemed more than he did her. He had said, only the other day, that he valued more than half his happiness to be owing to her; she had done so much for Helen. "And Helen is perfection now, I must say that," added Sir Henry, with a father's pride. "All her beauty coming back; and such thought for every one. Poor Lady Augusta! That's the business! If I could but understand it all." He sighed heavily; and his sigh seemed to chase away the tears from Susan's face; she said gently: "You must let us come and see you very often when Helen is gone."

"My poor child! yes, of course; but before that —



Why, Helen has reckoned upon you as one of the bridesmaids."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham, quickly, and what for her was almost angrily.

But Susan put her hand affectionately within that of her uncle, and said: "If I am not quite well enough, Isabella or Anna can take my place. Helen won't think it unkind; indeed, she must not. I do love her so much."

The expression of her face was so pleading, weary, and haggard; it struck some deep chord of feeling in Sir Henry's heart, and he dashed his hand across his eyes, and stood up hastily and murmured: "To be sure; we won't worry you; we'll talk of it all another day. You must get strong, my dear child;" and then he stooped down and kissed her, and wrung Mrs. Graham's hand in silence, and hurried away.

As the door closed behind him, Susan looked at her mother's anxious face, and said: "I can bear all, mamma; God will give me strength."

And from that moment there was no further discussion about the visit to Ivors, until it was definitely fixed that they should go there for two days preceding the marriage, and that Isabella and Anna should be Helen's bridesmaids.

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## CHAPTER LXXXVI.

BRIGHTLY and hopefully arose the sun on the morning of Helen Clare's wedding day; making its way through gathering clouds into the clearness of the pure blue sky. It woke many hearts to gladness, some to thought and prayer, and one to the struggle of a broken heart.

Mrs. Graham stood by Susan's bedside as the first brilliant rays streamed through the half closed shutters.

"My child, I hoped you were asleep; there is no occasion for you to be disturbed."

"I have been awake a long time," said Susan. "Mamma, is it a fine day?"

She sat up in bed, and her mother drew the curtain fr before the window.

"Lovely; so it promises."

"I am so glad; it ought to be lovely. I think I m get up."

"Why, dearest? You will only tire yourself, and y can do nothing."

"No, nothing." Susan's head sank back on her pill for an instant, but she raised it again. "Dear mamma, y promised me I might have my own way to-day; I don't w to be wilful, but please let me get up."

"Not to go to Helen, my darling."

"Please, please." Susan's voice became very earne "I can help her, and I ought if I can. Mamma, let me my duty to-day."

"Over-fatigue is no duty," said Mrs. Graham.

"Mother, dearest, don't make me lie here." And tone of piteous entreaty overcame Mrs. Graham's deter nation, and she kissed Susan many times, and then left to dress.

When next they met it was in Helen's room, in the mi of confusion and bustle; Annette superintending Hele toilette, chattering and ordering; servants knocking at door continually asking for directions; Helen herself, p nervous, trying to give her attention to what was passing, with thoughts bewildered with present happiness, and p sorrow, and self-distrust; and Susan, standing in the mi of all, suggesting in her quiet, gentle tones, holding pins Annette, whispering fond words to Helen, yet with that wrought expression of suffering which is occasionally to

read in the human countenance, even when the anguish itself has passed, and which shows that grief has been petrified by some sudden shock, and has left a trace which time can never eradicate.

"Now, Annette, that will do," said Helen, as the wreath of orange flowers was fastened, and the veil thrown over her head. She glanced at herself in the pier-glass; the beauty which it reflected could not be hidden even from herself. It seemed as if for an instant she realised it. The tall, slight figure, with its graceful outline set off by the rich folds of the white silk dress, and the exceeding sweetness of the fair face, so delicate in its features, so clear and brilliant in its complexion, and shaded by the braids of dark hair and the light veil which fell around it. It was a picture which none could look upon unmoved, and Helen's eye rested upon the lovely image, and a look of calm self-contentment passed over her countenance; and then, as some sudden thought struck her, she turned abruptly away, and tears filled her eyes, and she said, very quietly, "Annette, I think it is all done now. I wish to be alone. Dear Aunt Fanny, you won't care?"

"My child, no; of course that is what you want."

"And I must go presently. I must see mamma," said Helen, and her voice seemed choked.

Mrs. Graham looked round. "That will do, Annette, thank you; I will do anything else for Miss Clare."

Annette unwillingly left the room.

"One word only, I would say, dearest Helen. I don't think it is necessary to go to Lady Augusta now; afterwards, before you go away, will be sufficient; it will only upset you."

"I must," said Helen; "I must ask her forgiveness. She won't understand, she can't give it me, but I must ask it. Oh! Aunt Fanny!"—and her eye turned again to the glass, and then wandered eagerly round the luxurious apartment—

"why did God bestow so much upon me only that I might waste it?"

Susan it was who answered, with her thin hands clasped together, and her figure slightly bent forward, whilst her voice came from the very depths of her full heart. "Hele God has given it all back to you again, that you might make Claude happy."

And the bright smile of irrepressible joy lit up Helen's face in an instant, and as she threw her arms round her cousin's neck, she whispered, "Susan, if I can ever do that I shall owe it all to you."

Susan went to her own little sitting-room. Helen had prepared it for her on the day she came to Ivors. It was over the library, and looked out upon the flower-garden. She sat down by the window, unable to occupy herself; she could hear a great deal that went on in the house; Annette's voice, especially, told what progress the business of dressing the bridesmaids was making, and which of the few guests who were to be present had arrived; and once she came in with Isabella and Anna in their wedding attire, purposely to exhibit them, to pronounce the pink dress and white bonnets "Charmant, parfait!" and to look at Susan with an eye of compassion, and perhaps a little contempt, as she leaned back in the arm-chair in her dark silk dress, the Cinderella of the day. Annette had never loved Susan. There had always been a certain suspicion in her mind of rivalry with Helen, and now, when the thought was set at rest, she had something of malicious pleasure in dwelling upon it.

But Susan was far beyond Annette's power of teasing; she was out of the reach of every feeling, indeed, except a sense of strong support, arising from the calm trustfulness of spirit which lays its burden upon God. She did not think herself miserable; she did not think of herself at all; but as she sat alone, she repeated to herself verses of the Psalm

not always understanding their meaning, and sometimes being quite unable to fix her attention upon the words, but yet being soothed and strengthened with them.

It was as though she were grasping some strong Hand mechanically, and knew that if she let it go for an instant she must fall

So an hour passed by, and Mrs. Graham, who had been with Susan for a few minutes from time to time, came in to say that every one had arrived, and they were now only waiting for the carriages to take them to church.

"Helen will come to me for one moment, mamma, won't she?" asked Susan.

"If she can, my dearest, and if it is wise. And Claude has been asking for you; he wished to see you last night when he first arrived, but I would not hear of it."

Mrs. Graham hoped that her voice was firm, but it was not.

"Dearest mamma, I am so thankful, so satisfied." Susan held her mother's hand fondly, and a smile, the first that had been seen on that day, passed over her features.

A tear was in Mrs. Graham's eye; she averted her face, and looked out of the window. Something which she saw startled her, and a half exclamation was uttered.

Susan looked out also. Claude was below, walking in the garden by himself. She said nothing, but continued gazing at him.

Mrs. Graham made some little movement to withdraw her attention, but Susan did not notice it, her eyes were intensely fixed.

At last she turned round again, and said: "Mamma, I have prayed for him. God will not be angry with me for that." She took her prayer-book from the table, and turned to the marriage service.

Mrs. Graham did not trust herself to speak for some

seconds. At last she said : " You shall see Helen before service, my darling, and Claude afterwards."

" Yes, dear mamma, thank you, that will be the best. I shall like to see Helen at once."

And Helen came, hurried, pale with agitation, her eyes dark with the tears which she dared not allow to escape. She had been in Lady Augusta's room.

" Pray for me, Susan," she said. " Ask that my sister may not be visited upon me."

" Dear Helen, this is not the time to think so gloomily," replied Susan, gently.

" I have been to mamma," continued Helen. " She knew me—nothing more, I could not make her understand. There was a sorrowful bitterness in her tone; but Susan looked at her with a winning expression of sympathy, and Helen's buoyant spirits rose, whilst the cloud passed from her face, and she said, glancing at the prayer-book in Susan's lap : " I must go ; you will think of us. May Claude come now, or by and by ? "

There was a pause. Susan's answer was very low : " Not now, and by, not now."

Helen turned to her, struck by something in the accent and instantaneously, as if the truth had been revealed by a lightning flash, her woman's instinct read the truth, whilst till that moment her own happiness had hidden from her.

She threw open the window, and gasped for breath. Susan caught her cousin's hand, and Helen tried to speak, but her voice was choked. She covered her face for an instant and then would have moved away. At the same moment a breath of air turned the pages of the prayer-book lying in Susan's lap, and the withered rose leaves, gathered in the garden of the Armenian convent, were wafted away.

Helen stooped to gather them up, but Susan stopped her. " Let them go, let them go," she said ; the expression

of her face for one moment was agony, the next it had recovered its deep calmness.

The cousins clasped each other in one long, silent embrace. The door closed behind Helen, and as Mrs. Graham would have replaced the rose leaves in the book, Susan said: "Not again, mamma. I wish to give up all."

In Ivors church Helen Clare knelt before God, and repeated her steadfast vow, to love, to honour, and obey, according to His appointment; and in her lonely chamber, Susan Graham knelt also, to pray for Helen that the vow might be kept, and for herself, that she might be enabled to offer herself a "reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" to the service of Him, who was her all in all.

The Eye that seeth the heart was doubtless upon both, and both in His sight must have been accepted.

It is vain to argue upon the abstract question of comparative duty and self-sacrifice, where God's Providence is manifestly visible. He it is who educates us by the circumstances in which he permits us to be placed. If with a pure heart we follow the guiding of His Hand, all will and must be well; whether our path through life be cheered by the sunshine of a satisfying affection, or overshadowed by the consciousness that there is a happiness of which we have never tasted.

It is but a path, we forget that. And if God will that it should be the path of sorrow, there will be one unseen to tread it with us; and who does not feel that the loneliness which is accepted for Christ's sake, that moment ceases to be loneliness, and is but the realisation of the deepest, most perfect sympathy?

Susan knelt still; she was not praying, but listening. She leaned against a chair,—pale, motionless,—her eyes riveted upon the sky, her fingers clasped together. A peal of merry bells rang upon the air! and one bitter cry, one agonised burst of human feeling escaped her; and the crushed

heart offered its last lingering feelings to God, and Susan Graham had no worse pang to suffer.

A long time went by. Susan sent a message to beg that she might be left alone till the breakfast was over.

At length her mother's voice was heard; "Susan, my love, may Claude and Helen say good-bye to you?"

Mrs. Graham opened the door, and showed that they were close behind her. Helen came in leaning upon her husband's arm. Her eyes were bright and full; a hidden joy, too deep for words, was in them; and Claude, graver even than his wont, seemed lingering still in some thoughts of earnest devotion, as though giving his treasure to God's keeping, from the feeling that it was too unspeakably precious for his care. Susan rose to meet them. She held Claude's hand as she kissed Helen's forehead, and her smile might have been the smile of an angel.

Helen trembled violently whilst she looked at her cousin, as though silently pleading for forgiveness, even in the midst of her happiness.

"You have been our only regret," began Claude; but he stopped; something seemed to arrest his words,—a feeling almost of awe. Susan was so thin and changed, she seemed to him standing upon the verge of the grave. His voice faltered, and he added, "I did not know you had been so ill."

Susan reseated herself, but she did not answer.

Mrs. Graham interposed lightly, and spoke of indifferent matters; but the tone could not be kept up. Only Claude replied, and his words came with an effort. There was a struggle between present, unutterable joy, and the sense of some unknown evil.

Helen clung to him, for her limbs could scarcely support her. At length Claude roused himself, and said, gently, "We are more than friends, we are cousins now, Susan."



Susan paused—her face was death-like. Then she said, "Yes, friends all the more, because we are cousins, Claude."

The name was faintly uttered, but Claude heard it, and his warm feelings were set free as from a spell, and he seized her hand in both his, and poured forth all the hidden gratitude and joy which he felt were due to her. Susan listened like a marble statue, and Helen's eyes filled with tears, till Mrs. Graham interrupted the burst of feeling, and said, "You must go." There was another pressure of the hand, full of all a man's cordial veneration and affection, and he left the room. Helen turned away from him as she reached the door, rushing back for one more instant, and whispered, "Kiss me once more, kiss me, and pray God to bless me."

And Susan answered quietly, and from her heart, "God bless you, dearest, and give you peace, as He has given it to me."



## CHAPTER LXXXVII.

MARRIAGE is not the object of life,—only one amongst many means to its attainment. That may seem a truism ; yet we are tempted continually to forget it.

One way there is of reminding ourselves of it. It is to accustom ourselves to study the summer of life, rather than its spring.

Most truly has it been said,—

"Sweet is the infant's waking smile,  
And sweet the old man's rest ;  
But middle age by no fond wile,  
No soothing care is blest.

"Still in the world's hot, restless gleam,  
She plies her weary task ;  
While vainly for some pleasant dream,  
Her wandering glances ask."

But the true work of life is carried on in this dusty and toilsome time.

The careworn, faded, unexcitable, uninteresting occupants of middle age, those are the real actors in the great drama of life. As they play their parts well, so are the young safe, and the old happy; and when we think of marriage, it is surely wise to contemplate it, not as it is when youth, in the first flush of loveliness and enthusiasm, sets forth upon its flower-strewn road; but as it will be when beauty shall have faded, and the excitement of feeling become deadened, and life shall be seen, not as the vista to an earthly Paradise, but the dangerous way, along which man is to pass to death and judgment, Heaven or Hell. And there are some facts which might, if freely considered, suffice to put middle age in a very different point of view from that in which it is usually seen. It must, if there is anything good in the individual, tend to unselfishness, especially with women. The young girl cares for herself, her own prospects, her own hopes and fears. Life is so new to her, so engrossing, that it is only by an effort that she can throw herself into the minds of others, so as to feel real sympathy. But a mother or an aunt, or a friend, wearied with disappointment, and pressed down by care, has ceased to live for herself. When she joys, it is because those she loves are happy; when she grieves, it is because they are suffering. Self, indeed, may and does lurk under the holiest affections, but, for the most part, God has ordained that by them we should be purified from the dross of the world, and so learn to live out of ourselves, to find our rest at last with Him.

Neither may we forget that the most prosaic mind has its history, the calmest heart its tale of sorrow. When the complexion becomes dim, and the brightness of the eyes faded; when the outline of the features is sharpened, and silver streaks mingle with the dark hair, we say it is the work

of time, and forget that each line which has marred the beauty of the outward form may be but the mark of the chisel by which God has fitted the soul for Heaven.

And surely there is no period of life more inestimably precious. If angels watch the struggle of middle age, it must be with very different eyes from those of man. The stiff, unenthusiastic, saddened old maid; the nervous, anxious mother, must be to them objects of the deepest, tenderest sympathy. So much of life has been passed, so little is still to come! The work of every moment must appear unutterably important. There is no leisure now for dreams; no youthful excitability can mislead for the present; no gilded hopes can beguile for the future. Life has been met and faced in its true colours, and now it is to be closely grappled with. God help those who are engaged in the conflict, for truly they have need of many prayers.

Helen Egerton and Susan Graham sat together in the morning-room at Helmsley. Two of Helen's children,—a boy of five, and a little girl of three,—were playing in a bow-window, with some toys given them by their grandpapa, who since Lady Augusta's death had resided, for the most part, at Helmsley; and in a distant part of the house were sounds of a piano, which told of the school-room, and the governess, who was superintending the education of two elder girls; whilst a letter from a young Claude, who had just begun the ordeal of the world at a public school, lay open upon the table.

The romance of life was over; it had fallen into its usual course. Helen was the useful, happy mother; Susan the gentle, kindly, unimpassioned old maid. Hundreds such are to be met with in the world, of whom it would be said: "She is an excellent mother, and she must have been lovely when she was young; or, she is a very nice lady-like person, but so quiet; one wonders what her life can have been."

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"Shall you be ready to go out with your father, and with me, by and by?" asked Claude, suddenly opening a door which led from his own study to his wife's room. Change had come upon him also, but it was less marked than in Helen. He had never been young, and now it seemed that it would take much to make him old. In manner, perhaps in mind, he had grown younger. There was an exhilaration as well as energy in his voice; it told that doubt, and misgiving, and loneliness were at an end; that his affections were at rest; and it was with something almost of boyish eagerness, that now, instead of waiting for an answer, he came forward to receive it. It was clear that he was glad of the excuse, though he left the door open intending to return, and kept a pencil and paper in his hand, to persuade himself that he was determined to continue his business. Helen laughed, and warned him that he was longing to play truant; and he came and sat down by her chair, and took up a book which he had been reading to her the evening before, and turning over the pages, said: "One may long, but I suppose one must wait till holiday-time comes. These sunny days are great temptations." Helen turned to him with the fascinating smile of her childhood, and Claude's face became thoughtful, as some recollection, which was too sacred for words, crossed his mind; and then it brightened with unmixed gladness, as he answered: "You need n't be afraid. I am not going to be tempted. Susan would come down upon me at once if I were."

"I would trust you to yourself," said Susan; "you are so wretched if your conscience is not thoroughly satisfied."

"Yes, I must go back again to work." He stood up directly. "But we will have our drive this afternoon, Helen, and the children too. I shall have finished by that time, if magistrates' business does not keep me."

"And if parish business does not keep me," said Helen.

"And you will think of me on my journey back to Wingfield," observed Susan; "I must go and pack now."

"I should fret much more at parting with you," said Helen, "if I did not know how many will rejoice to have you at home again. Change is necessary for you, and I don't feel as if I could get on in the world without an occasional peep at you, or I should have serious qualms of conscience whenever I asked you to come to us. I can't think what all the Wingfield people do without their prime minister, and head nurse, and chief governess."

"It is very pleasant," said Susan, simply, "to feel no doubt of giving pleasure when one goes home, and the Wingfield people are very kind. Certainly there is a great deal to make one contented in this troublesome world. But then, with my dear mother, who could help being so?"

"It is more than that," said Helen. "Claude and I often say to each other that if we can only see our children like you, we shall scarcely desire any other blessing for them."

"Scarcely," repeated Claude; "not entirely." He looked at her tenderly, and added, "We are very happy."

Helen did not answer, but she put her hand within that of her husband, and the expression of trustful fondness in her face was deeper and more touching far than the first outburst of their early love.

Claude bent down and kissed her, half in affection and half in admiration. His inward gaze could see in her no change. To him she was lovely still, as on the day when first he called her his, save that the hidden beauty of the soul was exhibiting itself day by day in the outward form; and the deadened complexion and the sharpened lines of the face spoke to him only of woman's fervent affection, and her untiring spirit of self-sacrifice.

Susan looked on calmly. Years had gone by since the

sight of that hallowed love could produce one momentary pang; and now she said earnestly, "When God gives it, it must be very blessed; when He withholds it, He can make up for it, fully, entirely." The last words were only partially audible, and Susan's hands were folded together, for they were followed by a prayer.

After a few seconds she spoke again more lightly. "I am not, perhaps, a judge of these things, I have so many blessings. People think me lonely because my sisters and my brother are all married, but they don't know the interests which have sprung up in consequence, and Anna's being settled near us is such a brightness to our daily life, giving us others to live for and to love. Life can never be dreary when one knows that there are so many who would grieve if one were taken from it."

"And your mother?" said Claude, eagerly.

"Yes, my mother;"—but Susan's countenance slightly changed as she added, "I often think how she has been spared to help me through so large a portion of my life; and when we shall be parted, she has taught me how to live without her. It can be but for a few years."

"You remember that more constantly than we do," said Claude, gravely.

"I suppose we have all some special difficulty in our position," said Susan. "Perhaps the trial of single life may be rightly to remember earth, and that of married life, not to forget heaven."

"And different training may be required for different characters, I suppose," said Helen. She hesitated a little, and added, as though touching upon some doubtful, forbidden subject, "I could not have lived your life, Susan, I was not strong enough for it."

"Helen needs sunshine," said Claude; "in that, Susan, she is very different from you." He held his wife's hand in

his, but his eye rested upon Susan with the gaze of affection and trust which had once exercised such a influence over her.

Susan paused for an instant; then a smile of peace brightened her sweet calm face; and, as she laid her own hand upon those of Claude and He said: "I have my ideal of the safest happiness in this. Let me live in shade and look upon sunshine, and I am content."

THE END.

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his, but his eye rested upon Susan with the gaze of reverent affection and trust which had once exercised such a fatal influence over her.

Susan paused for an instant; then a smile of inward peace brightened her sweet calm face; and, as she gently laid her own hand upon those of Claude and Helen, she said: "I have my ideal of the safest happiness in this world. Let me live in shade and look upon sunshine, and I am quite content."

THE END.

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